SEEKING SHALOM TOGETHER:

LIVING OUT THE COVENANT OF GOD

A THESIS-PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

Humankind is created in the image of God, to live in covenant community. In covenant community, pastors should experience the "shalom of God," but do not always do so. Pastors are isolated, burnt-out and struggling. What can we do? This thesis-project was a correlation study to see if regular participation in a covenant group and practice of spiritual disciplines helped pastors better experience the shalom of God. There were weekly zoom "check-ins" and regular Marco Polo video posts, and concluded with a retreat. The community built, in order to seek the shalom of God, helped seven pastors flourish.

CHAPTER 1 – THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

God created pastors to flourish; personally, interpersonally and spiritually. Yet, there are many pastors operating in various stages of burnout, distress and apathy.[1] Some pastors struggle with doubt, with their sense of call and loneliness.[2] When pastors lead out of these isolated places of pain, apathy and discouragement, they do not lead as they were created to lead. Their ministries struggle, their relationships struggle, and the Kingdom of God is hurt.

Pastors preach and teach about the transformation that is possible through Jesus Christ. The covenant of grace offers salvation and also entry into a new life in the kingdom of God. Clergy understand this, intellectually, knowing Jesus has accomplished reconciliation already, and yet do not always fully experience the shalom of God. I believe this to be true because I have experienced this. In my first call, I seriously considered leaving vocational ministry. It was a tough fit, for a variety of reasons, and I was unsure how best to proceed. In the midst of that personal and professional turmoil, a pastoral colleague spoke great encouragement and truth to me. At the same time, a small group of pastors and I met regularly to fellowship and pray together. Each of these faithful pastors helped remind me that I wasn't alone.

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1. Scott Nichols, "Pastors & Burnout: A Personal Reflection," (Christianity Today, November 2019), accessed February 19, 2020, https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2019/november/pastors-burnout-personal-reflection.html.; Philip Wagner, "The Secret Pain of Pastors," (Church Leaders, September 2018), accessed February 19, 2020, https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/167379-philip-wagner-secret-pain-of-pastors.html.

2. Barna, "What's on the Minds of America's Pastors," (Barna.com, 2020), accessed February 19, 2020, https://www.barna.com/research/whats_on_mind_americas_pastors/.

The working hypothesis of this thesis is that the practice of spiritual disciplines and meeting regularly in a covenant group will help pastors better experience the shalom of God. By the "shalom of God", I plan to use Tim Keller's definition of shalom as "complete reconciliation, a state of the fullest flourishing in every dimension - physical, emotional, social and spiritual - because all relationships are right, perfect, and filled with joy."[3] God's people are invited into a life of freedom, accomplished through the person and saving work of Jesus Christ.

My desire is that pastors will accept this invitation into a life of freedom. I have previously attempted to create opportunities for that new way of living, in covenant community. In my year one project, four pastors met weekly via telephone conference call. There was no intentional structure nor content for the weekly calls, as the hope was for a more organic expression in community. I expected the structure to stifle the unfolding community. When we began our weekly calls, we covered a range of topics, including spiritual, professional and personal satisfaction. As the meetings continued, a disconnect began to emerge. We still enjoyed each other's company, but it became apparent that the group was divided on priorities and aspirations for the purpose of group. Half of the group was more comfortable networking around professional challenges and goals, while the other half wanted more transparency in every matter that we discussed. This difference of expectation became a source of tension and resulted in less investment in the covenant community. While I previously believed that it would be helpful to limit the structure of the group upon forming, I realized that an initial agreement to the purpose

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3. Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York, NY: Penguin Books Random House, 2010), 173-174.

and intent of the group was essential for its success. For this project, I will have some established structure to articulate expectations of the participants' involvement, while being sure the structure was not so onerous to dissuade full-time pastors from participating.

I will do a correlation study to see if participation in covenant group and the practice of spiritual disciplines will help pastors better experience the shalom of God. The two elements examined for the project may be helpful, both individually and in conjunction with one another. I will include both elements because I assume that both will help pastors, but I understand it will be difficult to separate them, to see which or both are helpful.

Eight pastors, all serving in different contexts and in different places, will meet weekly for thirty weeks. The weekly calls will be 90 minutes, via a zoom video conference call. They will also connect via the Marco polo app,[4] and will meet in person at different events. The first week, they will introduce themselves, sharing a bit about their spiritual lives. Together, they will read and reflect on a chapter a week of either a book of the Bible or a book for spiritual formation. On the weeks they are reading Scripture, they will read a chapter of Romans or Ruth. When they are reading for spiritual formation, they will read a chapter of Ruth Haley Barton's book, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation.*[5] They will participate in a three-day retreat, at the end of the thirty weeks.

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4. Joya Communications Inc, "Marco Polo - Stay in Touch," Apple App Store, Version 0.14.252, 2012, accessed February 19, 2020. https://apps.apple.com/us/app/marco-polo-stay-in-touch/id912561374

5. Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006).

During the weekly zoom conference calls, the pastors will do a "check-in," where they will share about their life, including personal, professional and spiritual matters. They will share where they have felt the closest to God and where they have felt the farthest from God. The group will meet weekly, but the pastors will alternate with extended check-ins and brief check-ins. The extended check-in will take about twenty minutes, and will cover the updates more thoroughly. The brief check-in will take less than ten minutes, and will cover the updates very briefly. After every check-in, one of the participants will volunteer to pray for the person who shared. These check-ins will be moderated for time and turn by the moderator. While the participants will commit to weekly attendance, there may be a time when someone misses due to illness, personal commitment or professional commitment. If that happens, there may be a bit of flexibility offered for check-ins, where another may check-in at a different time than originally expected.

In addition to the weekly Zoom conference calls, participants will use the Marco Polo app to build relationships, share prayer concerns, and share their experiences around the reading. Each participant may pose questions or comments and the others will respond, as their schedule permits. There may be several conversations, or threads, going at the same time that the participants can view and/or respond to, at their convenience. The participation in the Marco Polo conversations will be much more flexible, and can be an entire group chat or a chat between just a few of the participants.

The participants will meet outside of the zoom and Marco Polo conversations as their schedule permits at denominational events and also at a three-day retreat hosted at the facilitator's home. At the retreat, the pastors will share meals together, fellowship

together, and pray together. They will attend church together on Sunday morning. The final afternoon, they will spend some time looking at enneagram. There will be no assigned reading on enneagrams for the discussion, but each of the pastors will take an on-line enneagram indicator test.[6] Each pastor will share what type they most resembled and cover the strengths and growth curves. The other pastors will share how they have seen these enneagram characteristics exemplified in the life of the one sharing.

II. Theological Framework

There are many ways to create a theological framework for the project, and it will be impossible to fully cover every nuance. Chapter two will focus on a few key themes. God created humankind in the image of God, to experience the community the Trinity experiences. Because God's people are disobedient, God establishes a covenant with God's people to restore the relationship with them. God's people are promised the shalom of God, but do not fully experience the freedom, offered through Christ.

God's people are created in the image of God,[7] to reflect the community the Trinity experiences. God created God's people to be in relationship with Him, where they can choose to align themselves under His authority. The community that is experienced is ordered by and modeled in the creation narrative. God sets the creative order in the Garden and commands Adam and Eve to align themselves under it.[8] Adam and Eve decide to rebel against God and follow the inclination of the serpent. The serpent

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6. Enneagram Test, "The FAST Enneagram Test," (Enneagramtest.net, 2020), accessed February 19, 2020, https://enneagramtest.net/.

7. Genesis 1:26-27

8. Genesis 2:16-17

divides; first God's people from God and then God's people from each other. God's people are separated, and cannot be in the covenantal relationship for which they were created.

God continues to seek after God's people, calling them back to right relationship with a holy God. God's people have inherited the sin nature of Adam and Eve, and continue to choose disobedience. Nevertheless, God continues to pursue a restored relationship between God and God's people. The covenant of works are established when God promises a relationship with God's people and God's people align themselves under the authority of God. God established unique covenants with different people, always to invite humanity back into right relationship with God. Throughout Scripture, each person has a different relationship and covenant with God, but God promises a relationship and asks them to respond with actions of obedience. God is faithful to God's people and yet humanity is unable to fulfil their side of the covenantal relationship. They continue to choose to be disobedient.

Because of God's persistent love for God's people, He comes to the earth, in the person of Jesus Christ. The covenant of grace is accomplished by Jesus Christ and His death. This gift of grace should offer a life of freedom. Though Christians live under the covenant of grace, they still suffer the consequences of the first disobedience. God's people continue to struggle with living in the freedom the covenant of grace provides. Pastors are no different. Pastors need to be obedient to align under God's order and authority. But they continue to struggle because Satan 'the splitter' tries to separate God's people from each other and from God.

In the midst of the struggle, pastors are created and called to live the life of freedom and shalom that God intended. This life together is a life of mutuality, with "one another."[9] The covenant of grace promises of the shalom of God, which is a gift. That invitation to shalom is not always fully experienced, even by pastors. They were created for intentional community, and therefore, should draw closer together and to the Lord. As pastors live as they are created and called to live, they will better experience the shalom of God.

III. Literature Review

For the literature review, I will read books and articles which examine the dynamics of pastoral leadership and spiritual formation. These books will cover areas such as pastoral relationships, spiritual formation and spiritual self-care. There will be additional reading on the shalom of God and the understanding of the new life offered through the transformation of the pastor.

While many books inform the discussion of pastors thriving as intended, I will focus on three important works. *Resilient Ministry* is a summary and analysis of pastors' reflection on the fruitfulness of ministry and life in the pastorate.[10] *Flourishing in Ministry: How to Cultivate Clergy Wellbeing* asserts pastors need to experience high levels of daily wellbeing, resilience, authenticity and thriving, in order to flourish.[11]

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9. Sittser, Gerald Lawson. *Loving Across Differences.* Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1994.

10. Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013).

11. Matt Bloom. *Flourishing in Ministry: How to Cultivate Clergy Wellbeing.* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littelfield,2019).

Sacred Rhythms is a guide for a spiritual practice that helps pastors (and all Christians) to create a "rule of life."[12] These three works, and the additional works cited, give a framework to reflect on how pastors can better experience the shalom of God.

Pastors are created for community, in the image of God. They are created to thrive and to experience the shalom of God but are experiencing burn-out and living in isolation. God has created community so that they might fully experience transformation, and discern more helpful ways to live faithfully. These practices and rhythms of living together can help pastors abide in Christ and experience the life of freedom that is offered through the covenant of grace.

IV. Project Design

The project will be a correlation study to show if the practice of spiritual disciplines and participation in covenant group help pastors have an increased experience of the shalom of God. The data will be collected via the same assessment, administered as a pre-test and a post-test. The pre-test and post-test will have self-declaring measurements between 1 and 5 for each question. In addition, the pastors will also give a narrative response, as part of the post-test.

For the thirty weeks, the pastors will be asked to read the same Scripture and/or read from a Spiritual formation book together. The first week, the participants will introduce themselves and pray for each other. The group will read Romans and then Ruth, covering one chapter a week. When they aren't reading Scripture, they will read a

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12. Barton, Ruth Haley. *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation.* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006).

chapter a week of Ruth Haley Barton's book, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging our Lives for Spiritual Transformation.* In addition to completing the reading assignment, the participants agree to practice the Ignatian spirituality of daily Examen,[13] five days each week. For the purpose of this project, the practice of Examen has the participants reflect throughout the day when they felt the closest to God (consolation) and when they felt the farthest from God (desolation). They share, through self-declaration, whether their experience of shalom increased, decreased or remained the same. The pastors submits their data of participation in daily reading and Examen to the facilitator.

Each week the pastors will participate in a 90-minute zoom video conferencing call. Every other week, the pastor will do an extended check-in of about 20 minutes, covering spiritual, professional and interpersonal satisfaction. They will self-declare if they are having an increased experience of the shalom of God. On the alternating weeks, they will do an abbreviated check-in of about three minutes where they will briefly report the same information. At the end of their check-in, one of the other pastors will volunteer to pray for them. The alternating of check-ins allows each pastor to be able to participate weekly, while keeping the meeting time at a manageable time limit of 90-minutes.

The pastors will continue to build community through the Marco Polo app, where they can share check-ins of any length at their convenience. Other members can listen to the Marco Polo messages at their own convenience. Each pastor will participate in a three-day retreat at the facilitator's home, where they will fellowship, pray and discuss the Enneagram.

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13. For the purpose of this project, the practice of Examen has the participants reflect throughout the day when they felt the closest to God (consolation) and when they felt the farthest from God (desolation).

V. Outcomes

I expect if pastors practice spiritual disciplines and meet regularly in a covenant group, they will have an increased experience the shalom of God. Conversely, I expect if pastors do not practice spiritual disciplines and meet regularly in a covenant group, they will have a decreased experience the shalom of God. I anticipate if they do fully participate, they will be freed to live in a different way, one that is fully united in a covenant of grace and God's promise of shalom.

CHAPTER 2 – THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Created By God

God created people to live in community with each other and with Him, in order to know the full shalom of God. This *shalom* of God manifests when the people of God are reconciled with God and with each other. For this discussion, I will use Timothy Keller's definition of shalom as "complete reconciliation, a state of the fullest flourishing in every dimension - physical, emotional, social and spiritual - because all relationships are right, perfect, and filled with joy."[1] God's people, reconciled by Christ, are therefore given the possibility to be freed in every way. That freedom leads to God's people living in a different way, one that is fully united in a covenant of grace and God's promise of shalom.

God wants God's people to be reconciled, so they might experience the community intended, as exemplified within the Trinity. Starting at the beginning of Scripture and the beginning of time, God created people "In our image, according to our likeness."[2] In and through and by creation, God's people learn about the Trinity. Our faith is not polytheistic, which believes there are many gods, with their own particular nature. Our faith is not monotheistic, which believes there is only one god, with one nature. Our faith is trinitarian, which believes there is one essence and three persons. The

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1. Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York, NY: Penguin Books Random House, 2010), 173-174.

2. Genesis 1:26-27

Trinity is three distinct persons but only one God. Each person of the Trinity is in intimate relationship with the other and yet each person maintains autonomy. They are both intrinsically connected and individuals. The Trinity is a model for God's people to experience reconciliation and shalom. This experience is possible because the Trinity lives in distinct community, connected yet autonomous, and the ways God's people live in community with each other and with God should also be distinct, connected and autonomous. God's people, living in community with one another, reflect the image of the triune God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Created in the Image of God

God created people "in His own image, in the image of God."[3] The image of God reflects the community experienced between the three persons of the Trinity. When God creates, He experiences community as part of His nature and so His nature is experienced in His creation.

When God creates in community, it reflects the eternal being of the Trinity. Before humankind was created, this community was present. Gilbert Bilezikian states, "Although one being, he is eternally three persons within oneness. He values community supremely because he experiences the dynamics and the synergy of three in one. Thus when he creates in his image, he creates community."[4] The community that is reflected is

3. Genesis 1:27

4. Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as Community of Oneness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 18.

more than the person God creates, but the experience of something bigger. The creation of the person and experience of community points God's creation to God Himself.

God is a relational God who experiences His created in an intimate way. Kevin Ford writes, "He is Father, Son and Spirit, the Three in One. Community is God's essence. He not only created community, but He Himself experiences it as part of His very nature."[5] If God's people are created in His image and His image is in the very nature to experience community, then God's people will also have a nature for community.

The experience of community is specifically in the persons and community of the Trinity. Shelley Trebesch states, "God's essence exists in the unity and love of three persons: Father, Son and Spirit.[6] This interplay and inter-relation between the Trinity is distinct in that it is rooted in love and connected by unity. It is lived out in a very intimate and distinct way. Trebesch states, "God as Trinity models mutuality and submission- the offering and receiving of each person's role in the united mission."[7] When God's people live intentionally as designed, the community and creation God is experienced in a profound way.

Both living in the reality and experiencing the intimacy of the Trinity draws God's people together and closer to Him. Michael Frost states, "At the core of the Christian belief stands the Trinity, and its rediscovery and centrality in the life of a group

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5. Kevin G. Ford, *Transforming Church: Bringing Out the Good to Get to Great* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale, 2007), 37.

6. Shelley G. Trebesch, *Made to Flourish: Beyond Quick Fixes to a Thriving Organization* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 2015), 37.

7. Trebesch, *Made to Flourish*, 43.

of Christians provide both the framework for genuine community and the spiritual glue for it."[8] When God's people live as intended, in mutuality and submission, they choose to be in alignment with God's purpose and design. God's people understand this structure and it helps determine their posture and interaction and with one another. Shelley Trebesch states, "Theologians propose that because of the relationships in the Trinity and because humans are created in God's image, human relationships should likewise be mutual, reciprocal and egalitarian. Healthy relationships assume reciprocity."[9] Therefore, as a reflection of the Triune God, God's chosen people choose to live in a distinct manner, interacting with one another and the Lord.

In order to show God's people how to interact with one another, they must understand the mutuality between the three persons of the Trinity. Like the members of the Trinity, God's people are independent beings. Like the members of the Trinity, God's people are also dependent on each other for the ministry and in relationship. The mutuality exemplified between the Trinity helps God's people get a glimpse of how they might live together in community.

Created for Covenantal Community

God creates people to be in relationship with Him and with each other. God also establishes the boundaries for these relationships through the covenant and through covenantal community. Understanding that the covenant has boundaries is essential for

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8. Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 146.

9. Trebesch, *Made to Flourish*, 44.

the discussion because it creates the framework for God's work in the world. The covenant provides the full picture of God's faithfulness, love, and grace throughout history.

Through the covenant, God's people are given the opportunity to align themselves under His authority. Followers of Jesus Christ believe that Jesus is the establisher and fulfillment of the new covenant. It is through Christ's blood, shed on the cross, that God's people enter into the framework of a new covenantal community. Therefore, without the full understanding of the covenant and how Jesus Christ fulfills it, one cannot understand how the covenant would provide transformation. The covenant is the blueprint, the complete overview of God's love and faithfulness.

A covenant, specifically a covenant of works, is a promised relationship between God and God's people, wherein God promises to bless God's people and usually expects a certain conduct that allows God's people to participate in relationship with Him. God's covenant with Adam and Eve clearly states the covenantal expectations. God places Adam in the Garden of Eden to work and take care of it. God says, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will surely die."[10] For an authentic relationship between God and His creation to flourish, there needs to be boundaries. God doesn't force Adam and Eve to be in a relationship with Him nor does He force obedience. God invites Adam and Eve into a true relationship with Him where they have free will to choose to accept or reject God.

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10. Genesis 2:16-7

God blesses Adam and Eve with everything they need, including community, provision and peace. God wants intimacy in community with His creation, but intimacy does not mean equality. There is a difference. God is holy; God's people fall short. God is the creator; God's people are the created. God sets the parameters of order; God's people do not. All of creation and community between God and His creation are set in order, according to God's plan. God establishes the order, creating a framework for Adam and Eve to choose to be in relationship with Him.

God provides for them, but they must choose to be aligned in His order. They must choose to be obedient. In the Garden, Adam and Eve meet the serpent. The serpent asks Eve, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?"[11] When she responded to his question, the serpent answered, "You will not certainly die, for God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."[12] The serpent plants the seed of doubt, about God's goodness, in Eve's mind and she allows the doubt to take root. This doubt leads to temptation that becomes an opportunity to breach the established order.

God establishes the order and allows the serpent to have access to Adam and Eve. When doubt takes root in Eve, and she chooses to step out of alignment, the order is broken. When Adam chooses to go along with serpent, via Eve and her disobedience, they are breaking community with the Lord. They choose to be enemies of the Lord, right along with the serpent. "In the Old Testament this evil one is appropriately called 'Satan,' which means 'adversary,' or 'enemy.' In the New Testament, he receives a new name,

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11. Genesis 3:1

12. Genesis 3:4-5

'the devil,' which comes from the Greek word, *diaballo*, which means to 'throw apart.' That is precisely what the devil does best: to separate and divide, to destroy community."[13] Where there had been community between Adam and Eve and the Lord, now community is broken. Where there had been community between Adam and Eve, now it is changed.

When Adam and Eve disobey God by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they bring disorder where there had been order. They step out of their role seeking to become equal with God. The issue is not simply disobedience, but idolatry. NT Wright states, "rather than the problem being reduced to 'sin'—understood as a legal infraction—the tragedy goes much deeper. Sin is a symptom of idolatry. When we turn from worshiping the true God, we surrender the authority God has given us to the idols—the powers and principalities of darkness."[14] When Adam and Eve turn away from God and turn toward themselves, they attempt to elevate themselves to be equal with God. Instead of remaining within the ordered community and covenant crafted by God, their decision to break the covenant distorts their identity and God-given authority as His community. The idolatry (of themselves) makes them step out of that covenant relationship and identity to localize the relationship within themselves. The idolatry makes them step toward isolation, and ultimately results in isolation from God (and one another). They become isolated individuals who make disastrous decisions instead of the members of an ordered community, crafted by God.

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13. Bilezikian, *Community*, 51.

14. https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/the-day-the-revolution-began/

The evil one does his most destructive work not by direct attack of God and Adam and Eve, but rather by separating Adam from Eve and both of them from God. Bilezikian states, "Having irreversibly separated himself from God, Satan becomes the sinister perpetrator of separation. What God unites, he divides; what God gathers, he scatters."[15] The splitter splits Adam and Eve from intimate community with God. He provides the opportunity for rebellion, and Adam and Eve chose to violate the covenant relationship with God. They hide in the garden because they are afraid and ashamed of their nakedness.[16] When the Lord questions them, He already knows the answer. He asks them in order to offer another opportunity for obedience. Instead of choosing the Lord, Adam and Eve deflect their responsibility and their choice. The loss of their identity and security is their legacy and inheritance.

The consequences of their sin becomes the inheritance of all.[17] The Lord curses Adam and Eve after receiving an answer to the question, "What is this that you have done?"[18] This curse is the result of the fall, the result of disobedience, and the result of sin.

Instead of harmony, God claims there will be enmity. Instead of equality between woman and man, bias will exist. This new reality is not what God created, because it is broken, disordered, and disconnected. Bilezikian says, "The first reported casualty of Satan's attack in the Garden of Eden was community. Sin wretched the man and the

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15. Bilezikian, *Community 101*, 51.

16. Genesis 3:8-10

17. Genesis 3:14-19

18. Genesis 3:14-19

woman apart so that they faced each other no longer as one but as rivals."[19] Where Adam and Eve had been equals, they are now within a hierarchy. Where Adam and Eve had been together, now they are opposed.

Specifically, for Eve and all women after, childbirth will be painful. The birth of a child, which is a significant event, will not be without pain and suffering. Eve is told by God she will desire her husband who will rule over her. Women, created to be a suitable helper is now to be, in status, below the man. This, too, is painful, as it is another example of the brokenness in relationships Satan so desires.

For Adam, pain comes in the form of toil. The cursed ground will cause man to work by the sweat of their brow to grow food, only will producing thorns and thistles. No longer will the nature of work be fruitful all the time, nor will it be simply tending the Garden. In order to eat, the ground must be tilled, which is time-consuming, hard work. God also tells Adam that he and all humankind will return to the ground—the now cursed ground and dust from which they came. As the Lord banishes Adam from the Garden of Eden to work the ground, scripture reveals that God placed a cherubim and a flaming sword in the Garden "to guard the way to the tree of life."[20] This is a true consequence of sin: God no longer trusts God's creation.

Humankind previously experienced community and provision, but now, humankind labors and toils on their own. Everyone born has a sin nature; all are corrupt from birth; everyone is a sinner; all are outside the Garden; all are separated from God. The sin nature corrupts the way God's people relate with God and each other. Sin also

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19. Bilezikian, *Community 101*, 50.

20. Genesis 3:24

corrupts the way people view themselves. Every person inherits the result of the idolatry and consequences of Adam and Eves' disobedience. Every person inherits original sin. No one is spared.

Nevertheless, throughout time, God continues to pursue a promised relationship between God and God's people. The first covenant of works began with Adam and Eve, where God set the order of life in the Garden. God re-establishes the covenant in the Noahic covenant, when God asks Noah to build an ark to spare creation from the flood. God re-establishes the covenant in the Abrahamic covenant, when God asks God's chosen people to be circumcised. God re-establishes the covenant in the Mosaic covenant, when God gives God's people the Law. God re-establishes the covenant in the Davidic covenant, when God promises the Savior will be through the kingly line of David. Ultimately, through the line of David, the new covenant of grace will be established through Jesus Christ. Throughout Scripture, each person has a different relationship and covenant with God, but God promises a relationship and asks them to respond with actions of obedience. God provides God's people the opportunity to align in God's order and to be brought back into community. When God's people are in right relationship with God, they experience the community and shalom of God. When God's people chose to be misaligned in God's order, to be disobedient, they suffer the consequences of their choices. The cost of Adam and Eve's disobedience is significant. For generations, it functions like a virus.

Many years later, in the same family line of Adam and Eve, Lamech has a son named Noah. In stark contrast to the extent that God regrets creating humanity, Noah is described as "a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked

faithfully with God."[21] Because humankind was corrupt and disobedient, God punished them by bringing the flood. As Noah walked with God, God gave him specific instructions on how to build the ark that would spare him and his family. God said to Noah, "I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your son's wives with you. You are to bring into the ark two of every living creature, male and female, to keep them alive with you."[22] Noah had to decide if he would be obedient in the order that the Lord created. Noah is faithful and "did everything just as God had commanded him."[23] The story unfolds, "By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith."[24] The story continues as God sent the flood and executed God's punishment on all who were disobedient. He clears the earth, but "God remembered Noah."[25] God establishes a covenant accompanied by God's promise, which is repeated later in this same account, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth."[26] In turn, God promises, "I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth".[27] Noah was a faithful man and because of his obedience, he experiences the provision and shalom of

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21. Genesis 6:9

22. Genesis 6:9

23. Genesis 6:22

24. Hebrews 11:7

25. Genesis 8:1

26. Genesis 9:1

27. Genesis 9:11

God. Moreover, as with Adam and Eve, subsequent humanity inherits the consequences of his choices (in this case, blessing).

The second covenant of works established is the Abrahamic covenant. Abram is a man of faith. He is married to Sarai, whose name means princess,[28] who is a woman of faith. Abram and Sarai are married for many years and Sarai is barren. Abram has a unique call from God where God promises, "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing."[29] Abram responds to God in obedience.[30] Many years pass and Abraham does not understand how God could possibly honor the promise, "to your descendants I will give you this land."[31] Almost thirty years later, the Lord reappears to Abram and reiterates, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."[32] This is a significant moment—not only because God reiterates God's promise to Abram—but because in this moment, God changes Abram's name to reflect his changed identity. Abram's name, which means 'father is exalted',[33] is changed to Abraham, which means 'father of a multitude.'[34] God says, "This is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many

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28. Jeff A. Benner, "Introduction to Ancient Hebrew," (Ancient Hebrew Research Center, 2020), accessed February 19, 2020, www.ancient-hebrew.org.

29. Genesis 12:2

30. Genesis 12:4

31. Genesis 15:18

32. Genesis 17:1-2

33. Benner, "Introduction to Ancient Hebrew."

34. Benner, "Introduction to Ancient Hebrew."

nations. No longer will you be called Abram, for I have made you the father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful: I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you."[35] God continues, "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for generations to come, to be your God and the God of the descendants to come after you."[36]

At this point, God gives the covenant of circumcision - the visible sign of obedience and promised relationship. God states clarifies the order and states, "Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."[37] Gen 17:10-11 states, "Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision and it will be the sign of the covenant between you and me."[38] Therefore, Abraham circumcises his son Isaac exactly as God instructed. God honors His promise and blessed Abraham's descendants.

Immediately after this statement, Sarai's name is changed to Sarah, which means 'mother of nations.'[39] As Abraham finds the promise incredulous, he falls facedown and God answers clearly, saying, "Your wife, Sarah, will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him."[40] Abraham has to decide if he would be obedient to the order set

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35. Genesis 17:5

36. Genesis 17:7

37. Genesis 17:4

38. Genesis 17:10-14

39. Genesis 17:15-16

40. Genesis 17:19-21

by God. He has to decide if he would fulfil his responsibility in the covenant. He chooses to be obedient and Abraham and his descendants maintain the practice of circumcision, as specified by God. Circumcision is the visible sign of God's covenant of works. Like the calling out of Abram from his family and homeland, this symbolic action echoes the cutting away or distinction/holiness of God's people they have through relationship with Him.

Abraham experiences the fulfilment of God, and his descendants are promised blessing. Abraham, Sarai and their family experience the fruit of God's blessing and also suffer grief and hardship. Abraham became the father of Isaac, and Isaac became the father of Jacob, who was the father of the twelve patriarchs.[41] The patriarchs were jealous of Joseph and he was sold into slavery. "But God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles."[42] God blessed Joseph with wisdom and enabled him to provide for the people of Egypt, and his own family, in a terrible famine.[43] But throughout that time, it's easy to see how God is blessing His people.

The people of Israel had many children and their numbers increased greatly. God speaks through Stephen in Acts, saying, "As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased."[44] When a new Pharaoh came into power, he felt threatened by the number of Israelites, worrying they might join the enemies, in case of war. The Pharaoh organized slave drivers and

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41. Acts 7:8

42. Acts 7:9-10

43. Acts 7:10-16

44. Acts 7:17

enslaved them for hard work."[45] Despite the harsh treatment, the numbers of Israelites continue to increase."[46] As the numbers increase, the Pharaoh becomes more fearful. He asks two midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, to kill the boys born and let the girls live.[47] But they "had respect for God. They didn't do what the Pharaoh of Egypt had told them to do. They let the boys live."[48] The number of Israelites continues to increase and Pharaoh intercedes. Pharaoh tells his people, "You must throw every Hebrew baby boy into the Nile River. But let every Hebrew baby girl live."[49] Pharaoh is intent to kill the one who would oppose him.

At this point, a baby, who would become a leader of the Israelites, is born. The baby's mother, Jochebed, hides the baby in a basket in the tall grass along the bank of the Nile River.[50] Pharaoh's daughter finds the hidden baby and protects him. As the baby grew older, Pharaoh's daughter took him as her son and named him Moses, which means pulled out of water.[51] Moses is protected and lives.

Moses has a privileged and protected life, raised in the Royal family. The Hebrews are in a state of chaos and pain, where the Israelites are abused and enslaved by the Egyptians. In a moment of rage, Moses kills an abusive Egyptian slave master and is forced to flee because people know what he has done. Pharaoh hears about what had

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45. Exodus 1:8-14

46. Exodus 1:12

47. Exodus 1:16

48. Exodus 1:17

49. Exodus 1:22

50. Exodus 2:3

51. Exodus 2:5-10

happened and tries to kill Moses, but he flees to Midian. Moses leaves the Royal family and joins another family when he marries Zipporah, the Priest Reuel's daughter. Many years pass, and Moses lives as an outsider in the beyond the wilderness. Exodus 2:24 states, "After a long time, the King of Egypt died. God heard their groaning and He remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

In the desert, Moses develops a unique relationship with God. God reveals Himself to Moses, through an angel of the Lord, in a burning bush. God restates who He is and the established covenant with his forefathers. God says, "I am the God of your father. I am the God of Abraham. I am the God of Isaac. And I am the God of Jacob."[52] Moses is reminded of the historical relationship that God has with His people. The Lord states that He has heard His people cry out and He will bring them up out of that land. He says, "I have come down to save them from the Egyptians. I will bring them up out of the land. I will bring them into a good land."[53]

God tells Moses to go, saying, "I am sending you to Pharaoh. I want you to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. They are my people."[54] Moses incredulously asks, "Who am I?"[55] God tells Moses, "I will be with you. I will give you a sign. It will prove that I have sent you."[56] God tells Moses to go to the elders of Israel God gave Moses signs to convince people after Moses asks, "Suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but

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52. Exodus 3:6

53. Exodus 3: 8

54. Exodus 3:10

55. Exodus 3:11-12

56. Exodus 3:12

say, 'The Lord did not appear to you.'"[57] God gives Moses many signs to prove to the Israelites that He has sent Moses. After all of the proof and signs given, Moses says, "Lord, please send someone else to do it."[58] God is angry but sends Moses' brother, Aaron, promising, "Tell him what to say. I will help both of you speak."[59] At this point, Moses must decide if he will be obedient to God's instructions. He must decide if he will serve and obey the Lord or serve and obey his fear.

Moses and Aaron go to the Israelite elders with the visible signs given by God. The elders had to decide if they will serve and obey. They believed and they bowed down and worshipped the Lord.[60] Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh to say, as directed by God, "The Lord is the God of Israel. He says, 'Let my people go.'"[61] Pharaoh responds to their request, "Who is the Lord? Why should I obey him? Why should I let Israel go? I don't even know the Lord. And I won't let Israel go."[62] At this moment, Aaron and Moses proclaim the testimony given to them by the Lord.

When Moses returns to the Lord to question Him, the Lord reminds Moses of what He has done. God says, "I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the Mighty God...I also made my covenant with them."[63] God reminds Moses of His

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57. Exodus 4:1

58. Exodus 4:13

59. Exodus 4:15

60. Exodus 4:31

61. Exodus 5:1

62. Exodus 5:2

63. Exodus 6:2-5

faithfulness, instructing Moses to tell the Israelites of what He will do.[64] Moses must decide again if he will be obedient to God's call. He must decide if he will go to the Israelites. Moses is faithful and goes to the Israelites.

Moses is obedient and does what is instructed by the Lord. The Israelites, "didn't listen to him. That's because they had lost all hope and had to work very hard."[65] Pharaoh is given the chance to be obedient and he chooses idolatry of himself. The Israelites are given the chance to be obedient and faithful, but they choose not to listen because they are discouraged and distracted. God reveals Himself to draw His people back into right relationship with Him. God's people can choose to align themselves within the order set by God, or they can choose to be disobedient.

God sends ten plagues so that Pharaoh would relent and free God's people. God says, "Let my people go, so that they may come out to the wilderness and worship me."[66] Through this narrative, God invites Pharaoh back into right relationship with Him and with others. It is an invitation to relinquish the idolatry that sets Pharaoh up as a god over others, and a realignment of the right authority and order, originally established by God. It is an invitation to return to the order that the Lord sets.

God sends the tenth and final plague on Egypt but protects the Israelite first born children of each family. The Lord says, "I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. After that, he will let you go from here, and when he does, he will drive you out

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64. Exodus 6:6-8

65. Exodus 5:2

66. Exodus 8:1, 9:1

completely."[67] When the Israelites are freed, they run from the Egyptians. But the Israelites "went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians."[68] God delivers the Israelites and God provides for His people in the desert, through manna and quail. God provides the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. God's presence is with them as God blesses and protects His people.

As God reveals God's faithfulness in the lives of the Israelites, God's faithfulness is also revealed in God's Word. God calls the leaders to worship at a distance and then asks Moses to approach the Lord alone. "Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They respond, 'We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey" (reference). Moses then takes the blood, sprinkles it on the people, and says, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.'"[69] Moses obeys God's instructions and intends he and his people will remain faithful. They promise and yet disobey. Moses points his people back to God and the ways God had delivered them. As they live life together, facing life and facing death, Moses helps his people understand and see God working in and through their lives.

Even though the people are hard-hearted and stiff-necked, God never abandons them. He continues to seek after them, even when they are unfaithful. God reminds His people of the covenantal love of God, saying, "'This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,' declares the Lord. 'I will put my law in their minds and

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67. Exodus 11:1

68. Exodus 14:29-30

69. Exodus 24:7-8

write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."[70] God continues to give God's people the opportunity to be obedient and align themselves within God's order.

God's accomplishes His will through His people. David is the youngest of many brothers and tends the herd in his family's pasture. As the prophet looks for the anointed of God, God instructs him, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the man looks at the heart."[71] God reveals that He is calling David, even before anyone knows. He is setting the order and asking God's people to be aligned. When David is confirmed as God's anointed, Samuel "took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David."[72] God shows His blessing and presence with David, as He calls the Israelites back, under his chosen King, David, instead of the king they demanded, King Saul. God gives God's people an opportunity to be obedient.

King Saul is the king that Israel had demanded but is not a man after God's heart. He attacks the Amalekites but spares King Agag and keeps the best animals for himself.[73] King Saul has the opportunity to be obedient to God's command but chooses to do what he thinks best benefits him and his kingdom. Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel, "I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not

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70. Jeremiah 31:33

71. 1 Samuel 16:7

72. 1 Samuel 16:13

73. 1 Samuel 15:8-9

carried out my instructions."[74] Saul chooses disobedience and his own way rather than obedience under the Lord. Nevertheless, God continues to reveal Himself and invites God's people back into right relationship.

Sometime later, a great battle ensues between the Philistines and the Israelites. Goliath of Gath and David fight, and the forgone conclusion is that the mighty giant will prevail. In a great moment of courage, David proclaims his trust to the God he worships and serves. He says, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defiled."[75] As the Philistine moves closer, David runs to the battle line to attack. He is not deterred by the giant's size. He knows the battle belongs to the Lord. He has to decide if he will proclaim his faith in the Lord by his action and he does. He takes the stone and strikes the Philistine on the forehead.[76] Through this battle, and the way David responds, God's people see the enemy of the Lord, the Philistines, being defeated by God's anointed one. Through the military battle and the unexpected victory by the hand of a young boy, God's people are brought back into order.

God designates David as his anointed King but not merely to defeat the Philistines. David becomes the King that God uses to reveal God's provision. God promises David and his descendants, "The Lord himself will establish a house for you. When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring

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74. 1 Samuel 15:11

75. 1 Samuel 17:45

76. 1 Samuel 17:48-50

to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish a Kingdom."[77] God shows His faithfulness in protecting the Israelites and in providing the Messiah through his kingdom.

God is faithful throughout the life of David. After many years, David is made king,[78] but makes sinful choices, rooted in sin, including adultery and murder.[79] David is convicted of his sin and repents saying, "I have sinned against the Lord"[80] but he suffers the consequences of his disobedience and loses his son.[81] David, the anointed, is a man after God's heart[82] but he still makes sinful choices. This is no surprise to God, who calls him and anoints him. God calls David, knowing he will sin, and chooses to accomplish his will through David. God remains faithful, and offers the promise of continued faithfulness, even when God's people are unfaithful. God is faithful throughout the life of David and promises a kingdom established through the Davidic line.

God is faithful, through David, to God's people. He is continually revealing Himself, to invite His people to come back into right relationship with Him. He establishes the covenant between His people, as told in the stories of Adam and Eve, Abraham, Moses and David. It is a temporary covenant to restore relationships, which God's people could not fulfil. This is the structure of the covenant of works: God

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77. 2 Samuel 7:12-13

78. 2 Samuel 5:4

79. 2 Samuel 11-12 and 1 King 1,2

80. 2 Samuel 12:13

81. 2 Samuel 12:18

82.1 Samuel 13:14

promises to bless His people and asks God's people to respond with specific actions. God invites His people but humankind continues to fall short of the glory of God. They break relationship with God by not keeping God's law. They repent and respond by offering sacrifices to restore right relationship with the Holy God. This cycle repeats over and over, as God's people continue to fail, because humankind's nature is corrupt. God's people step outside of God's structure and isolate themselves in their sin. While humankind cannot fulfill their responsibility in the covenant, they atone for their sins, through sacrifices, to be restored to a right relationship with God. They make sacrifices continually but cannot maintain a holy relationship with God, because only God is holy. God's people continue to fall short of the glory of God. So God, in relentless pursuit to draw back unto Himself God's people, establishes a new covenant of grace.

The new covenant of grace is established through the promised King from the Davidic line, Jesus Christ. Jesus fulfills the prophecies and satisfies God's promises to God's people. As Paul writes in Romans 5:18, "Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people." Because every person is born with the consequences of Adam and Eve's sinful choices, or trespasses, sin comes into the world through one man. As God is constantly inviting God's people back into right relationship with Him, every person that chooses to follow Jesus inherits the benefit of Jesus, and His death on the Cross.

Jesus is the King who establishes the new kingdom on earth that is eternal. He is the King who testifies to the truth. Jesus says to Pilate, "For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth."[83] Jesus explains why He has come

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83. John 18:37

to the earth, to reconcile God's people to God. He shows how God will satisfy the covenant by Jesus' death on the cross. He testifies to the truth that God's people, while disobedient, can have a relationship with Him through the grace of God. The covenant of grace reestablishes the covenant relationship between a sinful humanity and a holy God.

The kingdom is established. The story of God's redemptive work and covenantal relationship is anchored, rooted and accomplished by the promised King. God's Word points to the person and saving work of Jesus Christ. It also shows us how and why the covenant of grace is accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus shows and shares His intent with the disciples, explaining to them why He came into the world. As He shares a meal with them, He prepares them for the purposeful events to come. He explains, "This is my body, given for you," and "this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."[84]

To reconcile God's people and establish a covenant of grace, Jesus chooses to die on the cross, as an atonement for sin. 2 Corinthians 5:21 states, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Jesus, who is perfect and without sin, is crucified to be the final lamb slain, to fulfil the law, and to become the seal of covenant of grace. God's people are redeemed through His blood and are therefore reconciled. God's people (both individually and corporately) have access to the wholeness that Jesus experiences within himself and with the Father and Spirit because of the grace of God.[85] God promises community and salvation to all who

84. Luke 22:19-20

85. Ephesians 1:7

believe in Him. Because of this covenant of grace, God's people are reconciled and have the chance to fully know the shalom of God, through faith in Jesus Christ.

The covenant is an important element of the foundation of faith for reformed Christians. It shows the pursuit of God for God's people throughout time. Understanding the history of the covenant, the promised relationship between God and God's people, is important for the project because it provides the full picture of God's faithfulness towards God's people. God reconciles His people, through the covenant of grace, and calls His people to be reconciled with each other and with Him. The covenant of grace reminds Christians that a life of freedom is possible only because of Jesus Christ and what He has accomplished on the Cross. The covenant is essential.

The Covenant Brings the Gift of Shalom

The shalom of God is commonly translated as peace and is given as a blessing upon meeting or a salutation upon departure. The word *shalom* can mean harmony between two entities, safety or welfare, or lack of war. In Hebrew, the root of shalom is *shalam*, and it literally means "to make whole,"[86] which is a transitive verb. However, *shalom* as a noun[87] is multifaceted. When one is living in shalom, they have holistic health in spirit and body, where all parts are brought together. The shalom of God does not come from working hard, wishing for it, or material success. The shalom of God comes from being in relationship with the triune God who is worshipped and served. The

86. Benner, "Introduction to Ancient Hebrew."

87. Benner, "Introduction to Ancient Hebrew."

shalom of God is best experienced by the full integration of the transformative power of Jesus in every area in the life of a Christian. Shalom is a gift, made accessible through grace by Jesus.

This shalom, accessible by Jesus, is a gift, but before it was a gift, it was part of the rites and offerings between God and God's people. The peace offering (fellowship offering) that is described in Numbers 6:14 uses the word *shelem*, which is very similar to *shalom*. The peace offering is one of the blood offerings God's people made for atonement. Blood was shed so God's people could be brought back into a right relationship with a holy God. This offering was part of the covenant of works. As the priest and the people participate, it is a reminder that peace is offered to all. Blood is shed so that God's unfaithful people might be restored and made whole by a holy God. This atonement is the created order that God set in His Law. God's people must decide if they will be obedient to God's will.

The rites of atonement are practiced as a body to uphold God's people's responsibility and maintain this covenant of peace. It is God's blessing for God's people. There are also promises of peace in Scripture, where God protects His people. God states in Isaiah, "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed."[88] God's faithfulness to God's people is promised. The Israelites experience it as they are delivered from bondage. "I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of savage

88. Isaiah 54:10

beasts so they may live in the wilderness and sleep in the forests in safety."[89] There is an expectation of conflict, but here, God promises a physical blessing of protection.

God's promise of peace speaks to more than the impending danger. Ezekiel speaks the words of the Lord, saying, "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever."[90] This promise draws on the covenantal language of Abraham where God promises to increase the numbers of his descendants. This is an especially significant promise to Abraham and Sarah, who was barren. God chooses to use the covenant promises not only as a testament of God's faithfulness, but as an instrument to accomplish God's will. God's faithfulness, experienced in the lives of God's faithful people, reveals God's provision and love. God's people, in response, are called to choose reconciliation and obedience.

Despite the best efforts of God's people to experience the shalom of God, their efforts always fall short. Regardless of the intent of the sin offerings, the story of God's people is that of disobedience. Humankind continues to disobey God, so God sends His Son Jesus Christ, for the purpose of reconciliation. God always invites His people back into relationship and makes it possible through Jesus.

Jesus is crucified, resurrected and appears to His disciples. Jesus reminds His followers, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."[91] Jesus tells His

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89. Ezekiel 34:25

90. Ezekiel 37:26

91. John 14:27

followers the peace they seek is not of this world, not by their own doing nor because of their own merit. The peace is directly and solely from God, accomplished through Jesus' death on the Cross. This peace, accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit, is a testimony of God's faithfulness to God's people, through Jesus Christ. God consistently gives God's people the opportunity to choose to align themselves. In this time when they will surely grieve, Jesus reminds them of His faithfulness. Jesus comes to the earth to reconcile God's people.

When Jesus reconciles God's people, by His death on the Cross, they are drawn back into proper alignment under God's authority. When they are aligned under the authority of the Lord, they can be brought back into right relationship with the Lord, which is justification. Ligonier Ministries defines justification, saying, "Justification is forensic, which means that it is legal. We are declared just in God's courtroom because Jesus lived an obedient life and paid the penalty for our sins."[92] Jesus pays the penalty that no one else could pay. Sinners who confess Jesus as Lord are brought close to the Savior, through the Cross, and this brings peace. Paul states in Romans, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand."[93] God's people gain this access into the shalom of God because of the gift of grace, accomplished by Jesus' death on the cross. This justification brings the shalom of God.

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92. Ligonier Ministries, "The Doctrine of Justification," (Ligonier.org, 2020), accessed February 19, 2020, https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/the-doctrine-of-justification.

93. Romans 5:1-3

Justification is an important concept for the project because it shows how God's people are brought back into right relationship with the Lord. Throughout time, God's people have chosen to be disobedient and attempted to assert their own authority in their lives. Humankind is unable to be faithful to a holy God. They are unable to pay the debt owed. God, in His relentless love, pursues humankind and brings them back into relationship with God. The relationship with Jesus is how pastors take the first step toward new peace. Through the reconciliation that is only possible through justification, God's people may experience peace.

In Covenant Relationship but Not Fully Experiencing Shalom

Because of the covenant relationships with God, every follower of Jesus should fully know the shalom of God, but that is not the case. There are several possibilities as to why this may be. First, God's people suffer the consequences of the Fall and though redeemed, still have divided hearts. They want to follow the Lord, but they often want to be the Lord of their own lives. They need to submit themselves under the alignment of the Lord's authority. A sinful, disobedient posture divides God's people from God and each other. Second, sanctification is a life-long process of surrendering hearts and choosing to be aligned under God's authority. Being made more like Christ does not often happen in a smooth trajectory, nor does it happen quickly. Last, people may be operating in isolation, apart from covenantal relationships. They may not have covenant community, spiritual practices or building blocks to flourish in ministry and life.

Christians are not immune to the corruption of the sin nature. They experience pain in many forms as they experience the brokenness of the community to which they

are called. What begins as a calling to sow seeds of the Gospel can easily become an unfruitful, frustrating, directionless toil. Events that are to bring joy can be far from heartening. Personal and professional relationships easily succumb to cultural hierarchies and discrimination. Brokenness slithers in to disrupt, disconnect, and split the needs of the Church and its people. Humankind suffers the inheritance of the curse, so Jesus Christ comes to justify humankind.

Justification is accomplished, once and for all, while sanctification is the process of becoming more like Jesus. “We receive this justification by faith alone, because there are no good deeds we can do to earn it. Because justification is wholly by faith, apart from any good works of ours, we are simultaneously just and yet sinners. Sinfulness still resides in us, yet we are cleared in God’s courtroom.”[94] Christians live in the tension of being brought back into right relationship with the Lord, but are not yet fully transformed. They are reconciled, but are still sinners.

After God’s people are justified, they have the opportunity to be sanctified. The Greek word for *sanctification* means "holiness."[95] To sanctify, therefore, means to make holy.[96] “The focus of sanctification is the healing of the dysfunctionality of sin. Since all spiritual blessings, justification and sanctification included, are the Christian's the moment he or she is "in Christ" (Eph 1:3), sanctification is total and final in one sense (Acts 20:32 ; 26:18 ; 1 Cor 6:11). Yet, unlike justification, sanctification also continues

94. Ligonier Ministries, “The Doctrine of Justification.”

95. Bible Study Tools, “What is Sanctification?” (Biblestudytools.com, 2020), accessed February 19, 2020, http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/sanctification/.

96. Bible Study Tools, “What is Sanctification?”

until it will be consummated when Jesus Christ returns."[97] Followers of Christ can claim the victory accomplished by Jesus and that victory is satisfied. The debt of sin is paid in full, but God's people will experience the full benefit of that victory only in God's timing. Phil 1:6 states, "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." This work of becoming more like Jesus, and experiencing the shalom of God, is a work and gift of the Lord. This transformation does not happen overnight, but is a gift given, by God, over time.

Sanctification happens in God's timing but is slowed because God's people are sinful. God wants to transform every part of a disciple's life but each disciple must surrender control of every aspect of their life, and choose to be aligned with the Lord. They are justified in the moment they confess, but that confession does not eradicate the disobedient nature of God's people. This disobedient nature is manifest in the toil of our lives, which is a consequence of Adam's choice in the Garden.[98] God's people confess and align themselves poorly and inconsistently, because of their inherited sinful nature, and therefore know poor and inconsistent experiences of shalom in their lives. God's people, therefore, resonate with Jesus' words to His friends in the garden of Gethsemane when He says, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."[99] God's people are unable to be consistently obedient yet Jesus continues to be in a relationship with Him. For pastors who are called to vocational ministry, leading God's people into a transformed life, they must acknowledge that they have the same tendencies as those whom they lead. They

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97. Bible Study Tools, "What is Sanctification?"

98. Genesis 3:17-18

99. Matthew 26:41

must choose to align themselves repeatedly. They have divided hearts in the same way their parishioners do.

Christians are inconsistent because they have divided hearts. They want to be reconciled with the Lord and they also want to be the lord of their own lives. God's word states, "Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded."[100] God speaks through Jeremiah, stating, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?"[101] As discussed earlier, humankind's idolatry of themselves enable people to choose to step out of intentional relationship with the Lord and with each other. They do not want to align under the authority of the Lord nor the structure of the covenant because they prefer their own independence. This deliberate isolation increases the likelihood of people truly being on their own and feeling the loneliness of ministry.[102]

Not only is our heart divided, it is deceitful. Our divided nature would have us believe that we can go alone. Our divided nature believes that we can step out of relationship with the Lord and with each other. God's people do not always experience the sanctification that the Lord is trying to accomplish because they have not surrendered that area of their life. God's people must approach God with humility and authenticity in order to experience the transformative work of sanctification.

To approach God with humility and authenticity requires a deliberate posture of submission. In western culture, submitting to anything or anyone outside of oneself is

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100. James 4:8

101. Jeremiah 17:9

102. Chris Railey, "The Lonely Pastor: The Value of Relationships in Ministry," (The Influence Magazine, May 2018), accessed March 14, 2020, http://inf.mg/33a via @TheInfluenceMag.

counter-cultural, and unexpected. Individualism, or "the habit or principle of being independent and self-reliant"[103] is a high value. The culture of the world is seeping into the culture of the church. It makes it more uncomfortable and uncommon for Christians to set aside their individuality to live in an intentional community. But God's people must be intentional to live in a different way.

When pastors have a clear and honest identity of who they are in Christ, and who they are in their sinfulness, they are better equipped to lead and ultimately flourish. Pastors are called to live intentionally. They are children of God and they too have difficulty experiencing the shalom of God, despite the fact that they lead faith communities. God's people are sanctified over time but it is complicated because of their divided hearts.

Matt Bloom has done extensive research on faith leaders in his project, *Flourishing in Ministry: Clergy, Ministry Life and Wellbeing.* He writes that every pastor needs four building blocks for well-being, which are happiness, resilience, self-integrity and thriving. He argues that without these four elements, they will not fully experience well-being in ministry. In Bloom's book, *Flourishing in Ministry: How to Cultivate Clergy Wellbeing*, he adds, "There are important interconnections among the building blocks. In fact, they build on each other, so when one dimension goes up, it tends to boost or build up the others."[104] These building blocks help God's people create a structure to keep being faithful as they wait on God's work.

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103. R. E. Allen, H. W. Fowler, and F. G. Fowler, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1990), 602.

104. Matt Bloom, *Flourishing in Ministry: How to Cultivate Clergy Wellbeing* (Lanham, MD: An Alban Institute Book, 2019), 3.

The concept of sanctification is essential for this project because pastors are struggling to fully experience the shalom of God. They need to understand why they are not flourishing in the ways they hope. Pastors yearn to see God's work in their lives and their part in aligning or choosing not to align under God's authority. This is a life-long process where pastors need to surrender their hearts, understanding their hearts are divided. In the midst of ministry challenges, pastors need to be sure they are making choices with knowledge and intention.

Called Together for Spiritual Practice

God's people do not always fully experience the shalom of God. As God's people are transformed, God's people wait on the Lord as they live in covenant community with one another and with God. This covenant is rooted and established in God's love and calls people to a different life. God, in the person and saving work of Jesus, desires intimacy with His people, and he shows this by and coming in the flesh. John 3:16 proclaims, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." God, in Jesus, is Immanuel, God with us. In Himself, Christ is the visible reconciliation of God and humanity.

God created people and calls people to be in community with Him and with each other. When the Lord came in the flesh, He comes so they might experience the same community they experienced in creation. This is shown throughout Scripture. Psalm 91:1 expresses this, "Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty." The Israelites found their solace in the Tabernacle and Temple, where the Most Holy resided. It was a sacred space for God's people to come together. The chief

artisan of the temple was named Bezalel, whose name means "in the shadow [protection]" of God." Exodus 31:2-3 states, "See, I have called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: and I have filled him with divine spirit, with ability, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft." Even the one who constructed the intimate, holy tabernacle had a name that expressed God's loving protection.

In Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, people meet God in a different way. They meet God in the person of Jesus Christ. When Jesus came to this earth, He offers people a different way to meet God, as Jesus was God in flesh. Jesus demonstrates and teaches about the importance of relationships. Followers of Christ must choose to be in an intimate relationship with the Lord in order to grow into mature disciples. This seemingly simple task is the most complex responsibility of those who would follow Him. Each follower must confess their sin and confess Jesus as Lord. God's people confess their sins, stating the ways they choose to serve themselves and their desires instead of serving the Lord. They confess the ways they have chosen to be out of alignment in God's created order. When they confess their sins, they acknowledge Jesus is Lord and they are not. They acknowledge that God alone is holy and that they are not.

Jesus states, "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full."[105] When Jesus came to the earth to reconcile God's people to Himself, He calls them to a different way of living together. He calls them to abide with Him so they might have an abundant life. This full life happens as He completes the work He began in God's people. This full life serves as a testimony of God's transformative work. The full life is what is promised and intended. It shows every aspect of lives being changed as God's people are aligned in

105. John 10:10

God's order, through God's work. The promised full life is a benefit accomplished because of the Lord's initiative.

The Lord pursues God's people and invites them to respond to His invitation. The Lord initiates and God's people respond. Jesus teaches His followers, "Remain in me, as I also remain in you...I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."[106] Eugene Peterson translates 'abide' as "to move into the neighborhood,"[107] and it is an apt translation. To "move into the neighborhood" does not mean simply to take up residence at an address, but rather to become part of the community. It means to be an active participant and even more so, to be identified by that community. As God's people move into the neighborhood with Christ, they actively choose to be aligned in God's order. They chose obedience over idolatry and chose intimacy with the Lord who came in the flesh.

People who abide in the Lord consistently and intentionally look for God's work in and through one's life. This decision to align ones' self in God's order, to abide in Christ, is one that must be repeated again and again. Abiding in Christ and entering the presence of the Lord is an individual practice as well as a corporate concern. God's people share the burden and responsibility of living life together. Gerald Sittser writes about God's command to mutuality, in *Loving across Differences*. He examines the call to *greet one another*, *forgive one another*, *comfort one another,* and to *admonish one another*. "The phrase 'one another' is derived from the Greek word *allelon* which means

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106. John 15:4-5

107. Eugene Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005).

'one another, each other; mutuality, reciprocally.'[108] These 'one another' passages show God's intention, and command, for God's people to relate with one another. God's people are created for each other, and that is essential for spiritual practice.

The beauty of practicing spiritual disciplines together in community is where God is praised and proclaimed, and God's people are built up and encouraged. People are mutually encouraged by each other's faith.[109] They do this especially as they "consider how (they) may "spur one another on toward love and good deeds" and "encourage one another".[110] This encouragement, this coming alongside, is the way God demonstrates His love through His people. Disciples of Christ come alongside one another to seek the shalom of God. Followers of Christ participate in covenantal community and practice of spiritual disciplines together so they can know the full shalom of God together, both individually as part of the body of Christ.

The biblical narrative shows the benefit and experience of God's people coming into the presence of the Lord together. The community of faith experiences community in Creation, in the Tabernacle, in Christ, and now through the community of faith on earth. Historically, we discover faithful people coming together to be an intentional community that supports transformation instructs us. The Monastic life began with faithful people living isolated lives of prayer and reflection. The life of faith changed from an individual experience into a communal life. Benedict says, "His rule required monastic vows of stability (a lifelong commitment and permanence), fidelity (one's character can be

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108. https://mmlearn.org

109. Romans 1:11-12

110. Hebrews 10:24

shaped), obedience (one is submissive to superiors), poverty (one gives up all wealth entering into the community) and chastity (one forsakes all carnal knowledge and pleasure)."[111] This rule of life becomes a model for people of faith living with intention. This pursuit of the Christian life has changed a bit over the years, but God's people are still called to intentional community for spiritual formation.

Spiritual practices were important for the Monastics. It is also important for us today. So much so, that denominations like the Methodist church have made it part of their focus for their denomination. The Methodist church has continued the commitment to life together so that God's people might grow into the people they were created to be. The denomination takes that responsibility seriously. They believe, "We have a responsibility to innovate, sponsor, and evaluate new forms of community that will encourage development of the fullest potential in individuals. Primary for us is the gospel understanding that all persons are important."[112] The Methodists see their responsibility as greater than themselves. They are created and called to help others to their "fullest potential," which is a greater experience of the shalom of God.

God's people are created to experience "complete reconciliation" and flourish in this life, free to not just receive, but to live in the shalom of God. The experience of shalom occurs through reconciliation with God and with one another. And this doesn't happen without the transformational grace of Jesus Christ.

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111. John S. Knox, "The Monastic Movement: Origins & Purposes," (Ancient History Encyclopedia, August 23 2016), accessed February 19, 2020, https://www.ancient.eu/article/930/.

112. The United Methodist Church, "Social Principles: The Nurturing Community," (Umc.org, 2016), accessed February 19, 2020, https://www.umc.org/en/content/social-principles-the-nurturing-community.

Followers of Christ are called to be in relationship with the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Followers of Christ are also called to be in a relationship with one another as a reflection of the Trinity and the relationship of the three persons therein. Community and relationship are the true essence of God, uniquely, intimately, and intentionally ordered for shalom, for peace, for blessing.

Though the shalom of God is a gift, and God's people yearn to experience shalom, it is pastors in particular that often do not flourish. As ministry leaders, pastors are confronted with unique challenges and circumstances that hinder their ability to form such relationships, such intentional communities. But pastors, too, are called to community and to practicing spiritual disciplines alongside brothers and sisters in Christ. Through mutual encouragement and by establishing healthy rhythms, pastors can come alongside one another to seek and to know the full shalom of God.

Paul encourages his readers in 2 Corinthians 3:11 by writing, "Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you." The God of love calls God's people to be in community, reconciled and transformed through relationship, and to receive the promised gift of shalom.

CHAPTER 3 – LITERATURE REVIEW

God created all people to live in community with God and with one another, as a reflection of the unity found in the Trinity. God's children, as followers of Jesus, are called to live in a different way, fully united in a covenant of grace, fully experiencing God's promise of shalom. Despite this intention, pastors sometimes struggle to fully experience the shalom of God.

The Biblical narrative, as discussed in chapter two, demonstrates how God calls His people to live in covenant together, with one another and with God. This chapter expounds what researchers, theologians, missiologists and pastoral leaders believe is at the heart of why pastors, in particular, face this absence of shalom. After all, God's covenant community operates as a system where together, God's people can create rhythms of life, set healthy boundaries, and face the challenges of ministry. Pastors become free to thrive, flourish, and experience a renovation of the heart, so they can better experience the shalom of God.

Created for Community

God's people are created "in His own image, in the image of God."[1] They are called to live together and with the Lord, so they might reflect the image of the Triune God. In *Made to Flourish: Beyond Quick Fixes to a Thriving Organization,* Shelley Trebesch writes, that God's people must understand the culture so they can establish a

1. Genesis 1:27

structure to stay focused. The culture and structure for God's people is found in the Trinity. When clergy understand the intimate community that is experienced within the persons of the Trinity, they recognize how they are called to interrelate with each other.

In *Made to Flourish: Beyond Quick Fixes to a Thriving Organization*, Trebesch states, "God's essence exists in the unity and love of three persons: Father, Son and Spirit. This interplay and inter-relation between the Trinity is significant in that it is rooted in love and connected by unity."[2] It is lived out in a very intimate and distinct way. "God as Trinity models mutuality and submission - the offering and receiving of each person's role in the united mission."[3] The mutuality and the submission that is shown within the Trinity becomes the structure that God's people emulate. This same mutuality and submission is also re-created in the way pastors are created for and live into covenant community.

Missiologist Michael Frost writes about living in covenant community. He challenges followers of Christ to integrate their worldview of the Christian beliefs with the contemporary world. The covenant community is called to adapt to a new identity and purpose in the world, but the Trinity still provides the framework. In *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture*, Frost writes, "At the core of the Christian belief stands the Trinity, and its rediscovery and centrality in the life of a group of Christians provide both the framework for genuine community and the spiritual glue for it."[4] This

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2. Shelley Trebesch, *Made to Flourish: Beyond Quick Fixes to a Thriving Organization* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015), 37.

3. Trebesch, *Made to Flourish*, 43.

4. Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 146.

genuine community is found in the world, as it points God's people back to the Trinity. Trebesch and Frost both understand and are motivated by the love shown between the Trinity and God's people.

God created God's people for community with God and each other. This is true for pastors, in the same way that it is true for every Christian. Pastors need relationships, not only with other believers but with other pastors: people who have similar experiences and challenges. Relationships between God's people and the Lord are essential to fully experience the Trinity. In In *Going the Distance: How to Stay Fit for a Lifetime of Ministry,* Peter Brain writes, "Since we are made in the image of the triune God, it is little wonder we long for and thrive on committed friendships. Relationships matter to all people; pastors are no exception."[5] In the midst of their vocation and call, pastors face different challenges. Nevertheless, the relationships that God has established as essential and formative remain the same. In the third section, the specific challenges that can hinder these relationships will be discussed. These relationships help pastors better understand the Trinity and the covenant community, to which they are called.

Created to Experience the Shalom of God (Created to Thrive)

God has created His people for a life of freedom and transformation. For the purpose of the project, I called this freedom and transformation the experience of *shalom*. This life of freedom has been called a variety of names, including *well-being*, *thriving* and *flourishing.* Aristotle studied the dimension of well-being. Researchers use his word

5. Peter Brain, *Going the Distance: How to Stay Fit for a Lifetime of Ministry* (Kingsford, NSW, Australia: Matthias Media, 20040, 145.

eudaimonia,[6] to help contemporaries understand thriving. "The Greek *daimon* refers to our state of being, our soul or our spirit and the prefix *eu* refers to good or well. So, more literally translated *eudaimonia* is having a good indwelling spirit, but practically understood it is living a meaningful and purposeful life, a state Aristotle thought was essential."[7] Aristotle believed that "living well and doing well was the same as being happy,"[8] which could be described as 'satisfaction' or 'contentment' today. He later changes his focus stating humankind must pursue "a certain kind of activity of the soul in accordance with virtue."[9] For Aristotle the pursuit of shalom is in being and acting virtuous, and this should be the main purpose of humankind. The purpose of this paper is to examine how pastors have been created for shalom, and to better understand why that doesn't always happen.

In the reading for the project, authors talked about the shalom of God in terms of *flourishing.* Shelley Trebesch defines what it means to flourish. She offers one definition, saying it is to 'live within an optimal range of human functioning, one which connotes goodness, generativity, growth and resilience."[10] The ultimate goal, to live within 'the optimal range of human functioning', is really shalom. This shalom is the complete transformation by the Lord. Trebesch teaches that pastors should look beyond the immediate problem at hand and avoid the quick fix. If they look beyond the problem

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6. Bloom, "Flourishing in Ministry", 28.

7. Bloom, "Flourishing in Ministry", 28.

8. Richard Kraut, "Aristotle on well-being," In *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Well-Being,* edited by Guy Fletcher, 36-44 (London, UK: Routledge, 2015), on line.

9. Kraut, "Aristotle on well-being,", on line.

10. Trebesch, *Made to Flourish*, 11.

at hand, these strategies and responses will help them better navigate the challenges that arise. They will act, rather than react. They can experience the shalom of God in the midst of living, and when pastors do that, they are actually flourishing as God intended.

Tim Keller writes about shalom in *Generous Justice: How Grace Makes us Just*. Shalom is usually translated as peace, and is defining it as "complete reconciliation, a state of the fullest flourishing in every dimension - physical, emotional, social and spiritual - because all relationships are right, perfect, and filled with joy."[11] This experience in every dimension is the testimony of what God can do. The flourishing that God intends is more than an "optimal range of human functioning," because this promised shalom is much more than what humans can do on their own. This transformation that is offered through the reconciliation of Jesus offers freedom in every dimension of life. This transformation is a gift of the grace of God. The focus of shalom, according to Keller, is that grace is a gift which is totally unwarranted and unearned.

Berhard Ott writes in *God's Shalom Project: An Engaging Look at the Bible's Sweeping Story,* that shalom is a result of obedience and humility, under the authority of God. Ott writes, "God does not want a people that seems to worship but, in the end, does as it please. God is seeking a people that is fully on God's side, that aligns all of life the way God directs and leads. God wants a *shalom* people. God's people are to be transformed into people completely different from other peoples."[12] Ott argues that the transformation is a gift of God, but the focus for God's people is being obedient and

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11. Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes us Just* (New York, NY: Penguin Books Random House, 2010), 173-174.

12. Berhard Ott, *God's Shalom Project: An Engaging Look at the Bible's Sweeping Story* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005), 45.

aligning themselves under God's authority. God's people must respond in obedience and they will experience shalom. Pastors, too, must align themselves under the authority of God, and be brought back into right relationship.

Not Living as Created (Not Experiencing the Shalom of God)

There are some reasons that may be argued why pastors, in particular, do not fully experience the shalom of God. First, Satan is working against God, God's people and God's purpose. He splits people apart from each other and from the Lord, so their relationships are damaged, and they feel isolated. Second, ministry is challenging and overwhelming and sometimes pastors do not practice rhythms of resilience. Without these practices, pastors do not flourish, and do not fully experience the shalom of God.

Satan is a Splitter

Satan is working to separate God's people from each other and the Lord, so God's people are not fully experiencing the shalom of God is. In *Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as Community of Oneness,* Gilbert Bilezikian writes about the evil one's destructive work, saying, "Satan is the sinister perpetrator of separation. What God unites, he divides; what God gathers, he scatters."[13] The splitter splits Adam and Eve from covenantal community with God and from each other. In the same manner, the

13. Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as Community of Oneness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 51.

splitter continues to try to isolate pastors from the covenantal community found in each other and in God.

Pastors are Isolated

In *Leaders that Last*, Gary D. Kinnaman and Alfred H. Ells write about the isolation of pastors from their churches and from one another, describing it as "the Great Barrier Reef of organized religion."[14] Isolation seems like a challenge too great to overcome, and yet, it is something that needs to be addressed. Pastors are created to live in community with each other and with the Lord. When they find themselves trying to do pastoral leadership alone, on their own reserves of energy and drive, they will not be successful. When pastors try to do it on their own, it separates God's people from each other and from the Lord. Congregation members may be influenced by distorted leading, which steps out of proper alignment.

The isolation is often more complicated because there are professional expectations that pastors will be the so-called "experts" in all things spiritual. There can be professional consequences for admitting struggles in one's spiritual life, so pastors have to be intentional with whom they share these intimate details. One pastor shared, "I don't know who to talk to. I never have shared much with anyone. Everyone knows you can't go talking to members of your congregation about what you're really thinking."[15] Clergy spend much of their time fellowshipping, serving and worshipping with members

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14. Gary D. Kinnaman and Alfred H. Ells, *Leaders That Last* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 20.

15. Kinnaman and Ells, *Leaders That Last*, 32.

of their church congregation. When a huge demographic of your social circle is removed, it is more challenging to establish helpful community.

Much of the reading about thriving in ministry was focused on essential relationships needed to combat isolation. Jimmy Dodd's book, Survive *or Thrive: 6 Relationships every Pastor Needs,* speaks to the temptation of serving the strength-glorified culture. He challenges pastors to seek out relationships that help form us; boss, teacher, coach, counselor, mentor and friend. These distinct roles help shape pastors to be effective. In *The Healthy Pastor: Easing the Pressures of Ministry,* Dennis Bickers writes, "A greater risk is not having friendships with other ministers, because that will make a minister feel as if he or she is in this alone, and that Lone Ranger syndrome is never healthy."[16] These networks are essential because pastors need community. If pastors can develop safe and helpful friendships, it could make all the difference for those who feel and are so isolated. In the midst of one retreat, in a place of safety, a pastor spoke, quite bluntly. He said, 'Look, I may be a pastor, but I'm an inch deep."[17] He was empty and isolated and leading God's people. It could have been disastrous.

Most pastors understand that serving a church will mean surrendering a portion of their privacy. They understand that and yet sometimes put a great deal of effort into keeping strict boundaries. At times, that desire for boundaries hurts the pastor and the community. Jimmy Dodd comments on this desire going to the extreme, "driving pastors deeper and deeper into the dreaded black hole of isolation. When, out of fear, paranoia, or

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16. Dennis Bickers, *The Healthy Pastor: Easing the Pressures of Ministry* (Kansas City, KS: Beacon Hill Press, 2010), 74.

17. Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told us about Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013), 19.

embarrassment, we allow no one backstage to enter into our real brokenness, we walk a path that passes through the hall of isolation and ends at the pit of destruction."[18] It is a temptation to pretend and avoid, which only makes the isolation worse. Dennis Bickers writes about keeping good boundaries for professional and spiritual satisfaction. Certainly there are boundaries of confidentiality and counseling, but Bickers writes, "It is not healthy for a minister to carry everyone's secrets alone. Ministers need persons with whom they can share some of the burdens they carry for other people."[19] When pastors chose to go it alone, they carry the stress, burdens, loneliness and fatigue that they are not meant to carry.

God created pastors for community so they uniquely understand how other pastors experience isolation. Bickers writes, "No one can better understand the issues a minister faces than another minister. No one can emphasize with the doubts and fears that ministers sometimes have than another minister. Ministers need relationships with their colleagues for encouragement and support."[20] This covenant community helps pastor have the right boundaries and the right support. Burns, Chapman and Guthrie are passionate about covenantal relationships, so they set another healthy boundary. They say, "We are saying that it is easy for pastors, fearing what people might think, to become isolated from others. By doing so, they fail to grow spiritually. As one pastor put it, 'I have a longing to be shepherded by someone else, but a fear to actually ask someone into my life.' Again, the themes all weave together: Isolation is bad self-care and poor

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18. Jimmy Dodd, *Survive or Thrive: Six Relationships Every Pastor Needs* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2015), 136.

19. Dennis Bickers, *The Healthy Pastor and Easing the Pressure of Ministry*, 81.

20. Dennis Bickers, *The Healthy Pastor and Easing the Pressure of Ministry*, 74.

leadership as well."[21] Pastors must be intentional to build covenant relationships to avoid the isolation that is possible. When pastors create community and create opportunities for healthy relationships, they combat isolation and better live into the covenant where they are invited in to the shalom of God.

Pastors Need Rhythms of Resilience

Another reason pastors do not fully experience the shalom of God is because of burnout. This is experienced differently with a variety of pastors but there is a disconnect between the expectation and actual experience, related to ministry, relationships and life. Kinnaman and Ells write, in *Leaders that Last*, about the challenge of pastors who try to do ministry alone, stating that pastors sometimes have a disconnect between the pressure of ministry and the internal pressures they face. They write, "All too often the substantial external pressures of ministry exceed one's internal coping resources."[22] This tension of life and ministry not going as intended make it difficult to continue. This is a result of pastors exerting extended efforts toward self-sufficiency.

Kinnaman and Ells write, in *Leaders that Last: How Covenantal Friendships can Help Pastors Thrive*, about how pastors, and their families, are suffering. Kinnaman and Ells state, "Eighty percent of pastors and eighty-four percent of their spouses are discouraged or are dealing with depression."[23] The majority of clergy and their families are struggling in their lives and in ministry. They state, "Eighty percent of those surveyed

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21. Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 20.

22. Gary D. Kinnaman and Alfred H. Ells, *Leaders That Last* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 2006), 33.

23. Kinnaman and Ells, *Leaders That Last*, 13.

believe that pastoral ministry has affected their families negatively. And 33 percent say that being in ministry is an outright hazard to their family. When spouses of clergy were surveyed, 84 percent reported being discouraged and in depression."[24] The percentage of stress is higher for spouses than the pastors. This may be a further indicator that relationships are out of alignment. In *Flourishing in Ministry*, Matt Bloom writes, "More than a quarter of pastors, find daily life very challenging, both in their ministry work and in their lives outside of ministry."[25] He continues, "Another 25 percent of pastors are sliding downward and risk joining ranks of the walking wounded of pastoral ministry."[26] Pastors and their families suffer different stress as they serve the Lord. They report this struggle as they are surveyed, but sometimes, the burnout is less obvious to the outside eye.

Barton's experience is not unique. In *The Self-Aware Leader*, Linhart writes, "Burnout is in the top three topics of concern for ministry leaders. It is mentioned nearly weekly is Christian leadership circles because so many people report experiencing it. We come to the end of our emotions and abilities, and we feel barren, empty, and dusty."[27] The abundant life that Jesus promises seems like an impossible dream for pastors as they are struggling with disappointment and burn-out. Pastors have used every opportunity

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24. Kinnaman and Ells, *Leaders That Last*, 38.

25. Matt Bloom, *Flourishing in Ministry: How to Cultivate Clergy Wellbeing* (Lanham, MD: Alban Institute, 2019), 7.

26. Bloom, *Flourishing in Ministry*, 7

27. Terry Linhart, *The Self-Aware Leader: Discovering Your Blind Spots to Reach Your Ministry Potential* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2017), 159.

and gift they have available to revive themselves with their own energy, drive and passion, in order to continue.

In *Flourishing in Ministry*, Matt Bloom argues that pastors must have four building blocks in order to flourish in ministry. These building blocks: well-being, resilience, authenticity and thriving, build upon each other.[28] He writes, "Our daily wellbeing is higher when we experience more positive feelings than negative feelings."[29] When pastors experience higher wellbeing, the other building blocks also increase. Matt Bloom adds, "Resilience comprises our capacities to adjust to changes in the world around us."[30] When a pastor is more resilient, he/she can be flexible to the changing landscape of ministry and life. Bloom continues, "Authentic people are honest with and about themselves."[31] Authentic pastors know where they have strengths and weaknesses. These building blocks are what help pastors experience the shalom of God. When pastors have these in their lives and ministry, they flourish. When they do not have their building blocks, they struggle.

Burns, Chapman and Guthrie have done extensive research on learning how pastors survive and thrive. They describe five themes of resilient ministry needed by every pastor who hopes to thrive. They are spiritual formation, self-care, emotional and cultural intelligence, marriage and family, and leadership and management.[32] These

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28. Bloom, *Flourishing in Ministry*, 3.

29. Bloom, *Flourishing in Ministry*, 4

30. Bloom, *Flourishing in Ministry*, 18

31. Bloom, *Flourishing in Ministry*, 30

32. Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 19-28.

themes for resilient ministry not only look to the person in Christ by the specific context in which they serve. God uses the person where they are serving, to form a pastor and help him/her thrive.

When pastors lead from places of fatigue, detachment and burnout, their ministry and families pay the price. Kinnaman and Ells write another story about Doug, another pastor who has struggled with the pressure of ministry. In the midst of staffing changes, he has been "working harder than ever,"[33] trying to work hard enough for two positions. Nevertheless, in his personal life, he has not been connecting well with his family, and does not readily spend time with them. When he does, he is less emotionally involved with them than before. His wife knows there is a secret, but she and Doug have never actually talked about the ways that Doug is coping. One big secret is that Doug is gambling after lunch. This long-standing habit of keeping quiet has increased the divide between his wife and him. It has contributed to his depression and enabled his gambling to continue. Kinnaman and Ells write, "Oftentimes, risky behavior, instead of transparency, becomes the welcome of relief for numbed feelings, burnout, and depression caused by prolonged stress."[34] The behaviors which attempt to hide and cover the feelings of anxiety and burnout, only further the divide between expectations and experience of the pastor. Like all dysfunctional behavior, these attempts at relief do not deliver.

In the midst of the struggle and burnout, pastors often try to find their bearing in the midst of the challenges. Kinnaman shares his own personal experience, which is the

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33. Kinnaman and Ells, *Leaders That Last*, 32.

34. Kinnaman and Ells, *Leaders that Last*, 32.

experience of many pastors. He asks, in the middle of a huge conflict, "Maybe God did not call me to the ministry. Maybe I should just quit. I could never take my own life, but right now I'd rather be dead than dying this slow death. I know Jesus wants me to pay the price, but this is just too much for me and my family to bear."[35] The spoken despair of Kinnaman reflects the inner workings of burnout. He continues, "The darkest hour of the dark night of my soul. That's how I (Gary) describe it to my friends. Nowhere to go. No one to help."[36] His phrases here, "nowhere to go" and "no one to help," are a profound commentary on how far away from God he feels. If it were merely the experience of one pastor caught up in turmoil, sympathy would abound. However, this commentary is the expression of many pastors at different times in their ministry. Pastors are created for a life of freedom as they experience the shalom of God, but the "dark night of the soul" prevents them from drawing into the presence of the Lord. When pastors do not have spiritual reserves to move them to a covenant community with each other and the Lord, the choice is to try to operate with resources they do not have.

Created for Spiritual Formation

God creates covenant community so that humankind can be spiritually formed together. As pastors live out the covenant, they listen for God's direction, abide in Christ so that their hearts might be transformed. This renovation of the heart is the fulfilling act of the shalom of God.

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35. Kinnaman and Ells, *Leaders that Last*, 13.

36. Kinnaman and Ells, *Leaders that Last*, 13.

In covenantal relationships, pastors discern together how God is calling them to live and operate in the world, as they serve the Lord. Trebesch writes that God's people are "transformed in contexts where there is a meaningful connection. There is the image of God in us."[37] God's work happens together, in community. Bilezikian agrees with Trebesch that the church, and pastors too, must remain true to their God-given purpose, using every tool possible, including the structure of community. He states, "Personal growth does not happen in isolation. It is the result of interactive relationships. Small groups are God's gift to foster changes in character and spiritual growth."[38] In these covenantal relationships, pastors interact with one another and the Lord, to see how best to live and serve in the world.

The Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) Peer Learning Project states, in *So Much Better: How Thousands of Pastors Help Each Other Thrive,* how covenant groups are essential for transformation and flourishing. The authors describe small groups, saying, "It (the small group) becomes *temenos* – an ancient word for "sacred space" – for participants. It supports their process of driving deeper into their spiritual lives, endeavoring to live authentically, and integrating tools for effectiveness in leadership."[39] These covenant groups become the vehicle for living life together as pastors are transformed by the Lord.

Matt Bloom writes about the intentional community coming together to help pastors thrive. He uses the phrase 'meaning system' to describe the purpose and identity

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37. Trebesch, *Made to Flourish*, 40.

38. Bilezikian, *Community 101*, 54.

39. The Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) Peer Learning Project, *So Much Better: How Thousands of Pastors Help Each Other Thrive* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2013), 127.

of coming together as pastors. “A meaning system inspires us to strive to become our best selves and it helps us through the darkest moments of life.”[40] The meaning system helps support pastors and see how God is working in and through the circumstances.

In *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self and Others,* Donald Hands and Wayne L. Fehr assert authentic relationships are the only way a religious leader can maintain spiritual health, because “in the long run, no one- clergy or lay- can live a healthy spiritual life without that kind of life-context for his or her journey.”[41] God has created us for community so that we might have the ability to see all the ways that God is and has been at work- and even more than that participate in the ways God is working. This is the reality of God’s structure, experience and inclination. In *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry*, Paul David Tripp states, “Autonomous Christianity never works, because our spiritual life was designed by God to be a community project.”[42] These systems are utilized to help clergy respond to the challenges of ministry, and to help them thrive, and experience the shalom of God.

Ruth Haley Barton writes of her own journey in *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging our Lives for Spiritual Transformation,* acknowledging that she was far from God and wanted a deeper union with Him. In the midst of a rich history of vocational ministry, there was a moment when she had to be honest with herself about her relationship with the Lord. She

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40. Bloom, “Flourishing in Ministry,” 31.

41. Donald Hands and Wayne L. Fehr, *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self and Others.* (No city listed: Alban Institute, 1989), 82.

42. Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 38.

writes, "While I was trying harder and doing more, there was a yawning emptiness underneath it all that no amount of activity, Christian or otherwise, could fill…In the midst of such barrenness, it was hard to even imagine what Jesus might have meant when he said, 'I came that they might have life, and have to abundantly' (John 10:10)."[43] This emptiness and barrenness that she experienced is burnout. It is the moment she, like many other pastors, comes face to face with the great need for more. It is a moment where she, and pastors alike, can be transparent with their struggle, disappointment and burn-out.

Listen for Direction

As God's people are seeking the leading of the Lord, they come together to discern. In *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*, Barton writes, "Spiritual community is the context for discernment, so an important prerequisite for leadership in discernment is to establish the leadership group as a community for discernment. This means that our life together as leaders is grounded in prayer, and other spiritual practices."[44] Pastors lead others as they discern God's work in their ministry and lives, and pastors draw together to listen and respond to God.

In *Discipleship that Fits*, Bobby Harrington and Alex Absalom speak to God's role and the role of God's people in that spiritual formation. They state, "Our place, as disciples, is to show up, to be consistent, and open our hearts to the Spirit of God living

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43. Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 10.

44. Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, 194.

inside of us. God's part is to work within us and guide the process."[45] This is the work of the Lord for God's people and on their behalf. God's people are created for this purpose. Burns, Chapman and Guthrie, write, "How can pastors build reflection into their lives? While it can take place is spontaneous moments of occasional relational appointments, we have found that quality reflection requires intentionality. It doesn't just 'happen' in the midst of daily demands."[46] They write of the importance of building these rhythms of resilience. For the project, the pastors took on the practice of Examen to build, into their lives and the group ethos, these rhythms of resilience.

Barton states the importance of ordering life to be able to experience the community God's designs and models. "The purpose of journeying together in spiritual friendship and spiritual community (whether there are just two of you or whether you are in a small group) is to listen to one another's desire for God, to nurture that desire in each other and to support one another in seeking a way of life that is consistent with that desire."[47] The desire to live life in a particular way is identified and encouraged in community, where God's people are listening to God and each other.

Barton, in S*acred Rhythms: Arranging our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*, writes about the spiritual disciplines that are key for a pastor to truly be spiritually transformed. She illustrates a guide for entering the presence of the Lord. She describes the spiritual disciplines that are necessary for spiritual transformation; the longing for more, solitude, scripture, prayer, honoring the body, self-examination, discernment,

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45. Bobby Harrington and Alex Absalom, *Discipleship that Fits* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 139.

46. Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 49.

47. Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, 169.

sabbath and a rule of life. They are patterns of arranging life and ministry to thrive, and ultimately experience the shalom of God. She writes, "One of the defining characteristics of any spiritual community is a shared desire and willingness to act on the basis of discernment rather than human planning and strategic maneuvering."[48] God's leaders lead in step with the Lord.

In the spiritual practices one can be with the One, God's people are formed and reformed, they begin again. The practice allows God, in God's wisdom and creativity, to build God's leaders into the disciples needed. John Wimber writes, "If there is anything that characterizes Christian maturity, it is the willingness to become a beginner again for Jesus Christ. It is a willingness to put our hand in his and say, 'I'm scared to death, but I'll go with you. You're the Pearl of great price.'"[49] In these private moments, the follower of Christ can take notice of God's work. God's people notice in private so they can do what God has called them to do.

Abide in Christ

As pastors abide in Christ, they can more fully experience the presence of Christ in our lives. They make their home in Christ and Christ (and the Father and the Holy Spirit) may his/their home in them. As they live together, they can see the holiness of God contrasted with their human frailties, not so that they would be overcome with shame but that they might draw ever close to God. Terry Linhart writes, "The foundational reason for examining our lives and blind spots is so we can be more like

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48. Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, 182.

49. Harrington and Absalom, *Discipleship that Fits*, 21.

Christ in our work. Jesus made clear the connection between the loving presence of Christ and being fruitful in ministry."[50] God's people reflect the community and nature of the Lord. When we abide in Him together, the world better sees the Lord.

In this attempt to see the Lord, pastors create structure to draw closer to each other and to the Lord. Peter Scazzero calls it a *Rule of Life*, stating, "This Rule of Life changes helps God's people be the people of God, through a unique combination of spiritual practices in to a structure that enables us to pay attention to God in everything we do."[51] This is the key structure to help pay attention to God. This structure can be different for different groups of leaders but the intent is the same; to grow and abide in Christ. In *the Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team and World,* Peter Scazzero states, "it is a support structure that helps us to grow up and abide in Christ. This in turn enables our lives to thrive spiritually and our leadership to be abundantly fruitful."[52] This intention for an ordered life helps pastors thrive and to experience the communal life together. Bilezikian states, "For contemporary Christians, to meet regularly in small groups is not an option or a luxury. It is a biblical mandate that they must obey if they want to experience communal life and if their churches are to become biblically functioning communities."[53] Meeting regularly helps God's leaders to be function in the way they were design to function. This design is why were created.

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50. Linhart, *The Self-Aware Leader*, 28.

51. Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team and the World* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000/2011), 136.

52. Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 135.

53. Bilezikian, *Community 101*, 55.

God wants God's people to be in step, in constant attentiveness and community with the Lord. God wants His leaders to be spiritual leaders leading spiritual people. "If spiritual leadership is anything, it is the capacity to see the bush burning in the middle of our own life and having enough sense to turn aside, take off our shoes and pay attention."[54] She continues, "At the heart of spiritual leadership is the capacity to notice the activity of God so we can join him in it."[55] Every follower of the Lord must decide to notice, respond and join.

Linhart speaks specifically about being effective in ministry, reminding us that apart from Jesus, we can do nothing of kingdom value. If clergy do not abide in Christ, slowly but surely, they will move away from their intentions. Greer and his team talk about the inevitability of the negative impact on the churches when clergy are not attentive to the mission. In *Mission Drift*, Greer and Horst write, "Incremental, slow, personal mission creep often leads to organizational mission creep. Mission True leaders not growing in Christ lead their organizations with feet on shaky ground. Yes, they may get a lot done, but without a healthy dependence on God, it is futile striving."[56] Pastors must stay true to their mission so that the Lord's will can be accomplished.

Hirsch reminds that our institutions are not the priority, our comfort is not the priority, our traditions are not the priority. The priority and focus are always Jesus. He tells us, "We cannot for a moment, take our focus off Christ and hope to understand what

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54. Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, 64.

55. Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 68.

56. Greer and Horst, *Mission Drift: The Unspoken Crisis Facing Leaders, Charities, and Churches* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2014), 91.

it means to be his redeemed and empowered people. Jesus remains the living center of the church- we know ourselves and our purposes in relation to him and to God through him alone. Christianity is Christ-focused, Christ-defined, and Christ-led, or it is not Christ-ianity."[57] Christianity is distinct. It is particular. It is unique. It is distinct, particular and unique because of the person and saving work of Jesus Christ and this relationship brings with it a unique calling. "In order to remain true to the is unique calling, churches (and individual disciples as well) need to continually undergo the process of returning to Jesus to assess whether we are faithful to him, whether we rightly express his person and extend his work."[58] Hirsch focuses a great deal on getting back to the right focus, on being intentional to keep the right thing- really the right person- at the forefront. Hirsch is so consistent about the urgency of the Gospel - our continuing the work that was set up by Jesus Christ to His disciples. We know from God's Word what Jesus said. We learn about the person and saving work of the Messiah and we can choose to draw ever close to the Lord.

In *the Self-Aware Leader,* Linhart challenges, "Conforming to Christ is not about doing more or gaining more…We are to be conformed in our hearts to Jesus, to live out Christ's transformation so that his power is evident to a world bored to tears by religiosity and sectarianism, and looking for a deeper and hope-giving version of Christianity."[59] Both Hirsch and Linhart are acutely aware that the current values,

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57. Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006), 21.

58. Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 74.

59. Linhart, *The Self-Aware Leader*, 43.

schedules, temptations, apathy and so many other things may tempt us to focus on the wrong things.

In order for God's leaders to be the people of God that they were created to be, they must cultivate and protect a spiritual practice. When they are the people of God, they can lead the people of God in a way that glorifies God. In *Leading God's People: Wisdom From the Early Church for Today*, Christopher Beeley states the obvious pit-fall for busy pastors, stating, "How easy it can be, in the busyness of active ministry, to overlook our most central work, which is to know and love God, so that we may adequately feed others."[60] These distractions, which can be positively received, and are often part of the vocational job description for leaders, but should not be the priority. For McNeal, the priority is the work God does in and through His leaders. It is essential and without it, can be catastrophic. "Devoid of a growing, personal, dynamic relationship with God, spiritual leaders become casualties."[61] The spiritual leader becoming the casualty is only the first consequences for lack of spiritual practice. Spiritual leaders without their own spiritual practices can easily harm churches, making them gathering bodies who are far from the Lord.

Renovation of the Heart

Frost calls followers of Christ to a different life than they have experienced. In an era where faith is often not valued, God's people are to remind others, who do not even

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60. Christopher A. Beeley, *Leading God's People: Wisdom From the Early Church for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 30.

61. Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God will Shape Spiritual Leaders* (Grand Rapids, IL: Zondervan, 2015), 139.

know they need a life of faith, of the promise fulfilled in Jesus Christ. In *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders,* Reggie McNeal writes, "The Christian movement must be the living, breathing promise to society that it is possible to live out the values of Christ."[62] The living out of the promise, the living out of the shalom of God, makes disciples. It is the call of individual and of Christian communities alike.

Knowing that we need a relationship with God is the first step to allowing God to transform us. Linhart writes, "It isn't enough to get rid of the old; we need to take that second step to put on the new self that God fashions in us."[63] God has great plans for His people, beyond their limited expectations. It is God's plan and God's inclination. Pastors are reminded because their human ego, fear, distraction, and pragmatisms may implore them to try to do it on their own, or more often to "help God'. It is so easy to slip into that fallacy and Christians, especially the pastors who lead them, must have not only an attitude change, not only a perspective change, but a complete heart change. Linhart does a beautiful job of reminding pastors who they are, and also who the real Savior is. "The real problem is a wounded heart. No matter how much we work to modify, suppress, drown, or medicate wounds, we need a renovation of the heart. We need to cry out to Jesus, confess where we've tried to be our own Savior, and allow him to rule in all corners of our hearts."[64] In *Growing Young*, Powell, Mulder and Griffin speak of Dallas Willard, saying, "Dallas Willard insists that "taking Jesus seriously means that rather than succumbing to the gospel of 'sin management' that mostly deals with reward when we

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62. Frost, *Exiles*, 15.

63. Linhart, *The Self-Aware Leader*, 25.

64. Linhart, *The Self-Aware Leader*, 72.

die, we pay attention to real life, in this moment, in this place, with these people'. This gospel is not something from two thousand years ago or for two thousand years from now. It's for today."[65] This renovation of the heart is essential to our experience of the shalom of God.

This pursuit of the presence of the Lord is the most transformative work that can be done, and it has already been accomplished in the person of Jesus Christ. God's people are created in the image of God, and called to live out the covenant together. While created to live fully experience the shalom of God, this does not always happen. Hebrews 10:24-5 encourages, "Let us consider how we might spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another- and all the more as you see the day approaching" (NIV). Shalom people pursue this life of faithfulness and experience the fulfilment of God's work in and through their lives. To God be the glory.

65. Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016), 141.

CHAPTER 4 – PROJECT DESIGN

Hypothesis

The practice of spiritual disciplines and meeting regularly in a covenant group will help pastors experience the shalom of God.

Process

Seven pastors met together weekly for ninety minutes on a Zoom video conference call facilitated by the same leader for a period of thirty weeks. During these weekly calls, each pastor shared their experience of the shalom of God, sharing if it had increased or decreased. They also alternated bi-weekly with a longer (twenty minutes) and shorter (eight minutes) check-in to allow each member enough time to share. The pastors covered different aspects of their life, including professional, personal, interpersonal and/or spiritual satisfaction. Each pastor was prayed for at the end of their bi-weekly check-in (whether it was a longer or shorter check-in) by one of the covenant group members. Each pastor committed to pray for the others for the duration of the covenant.

As schedule permitted, the pastors maintained contact outside of the weekly Zoom meetings. This communication happened through the Marco Polo app,[1] which allowed people to participate in thread conversations of video messages. Each pastor shared updates, prayer requests and information, including sharing videos messages of

1. Joya Communications Inc, "Marco Polo - Stay in Touch,"

their office spaces and homes. They shared these personal bits of information to get to know each other, and build community. The members chatted on phone calls and texts outside of our weekly check-ins. A few of the pastors were able to meet at different denominational events and vacations.

For thirty weeks, the pastors practiced spiritual formation together. The first week, the pastors introduced themselves and shared a bit about their lives. For the duration of the project, the pastors were asked to read the same Scripture and/or read from a Spiritual formation book together. The group read Romans and then Ruth, covering one chapter a week. When they were not reading Scripture, they read a chapter a week of Ruth Haley Barton's book, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging our Lives for Spiritual Transformation.* In addition to completing the reading assignment, the participants agreed to practice the Ignatian spirituality of daily Examen, five days each week. For the purpose of this project, the practice of Examen had the participants reflect throughout the day when they felt the closest to God (consolation) and when they felt the farthest from God (desolation). They shared, through self-declaration, whether their experience of shalom increased, decreased or remained the same. The pastors submitted their data of participation in daily reading and Examen to the facilitator.

At the end of the thirty weeks, the pastors met together in person for a three-day retreat at the facilitator's home. During this time, the pastors enjoyed fellowship, including table fellowship together[2]. They prayed throughout the retreat for and with each other. They had an extended conversation about enneagram as it related to their functioning in ministry and in the world, during one full afternoon. The data for

2. See appendix for retreat schedule.

enneagram was gathered by a pre-test done on line, right before we the retreat. Informal summaries of the enneagram profiles overviews were distributed[3] and discussed at the retreat. Each participant discussed the expected characteristics present in their life and ministry and the other participants contributed with feedback of their observations as well. The discussions focused on strengths to build upon and growth curves for the participants to address. Originally, the intent was to cover the enneagram discussion over the weekly zoom call, but this discussion was moved to the retreat, in order to give more focused time to it.

Data

The analyzed data was gathered using an examining correlation study. A correlations study is a type of research design where one looks to see if two or more variables are related, and if so, how?

Pastors submitted a pre-test and post-test questionnaire,[4] providing straight data for the first four questions and ranking 1 to 5 in the last three questions. Each participant took a pretest at beginning and a post test at the end, with the same questions, to see if their experience of the shalom of God would increase after participation in the project. The questionnaire included the following questions:

1. How may minutes a week on average do you spend in personal devotions (including but not limited to journaling, reading, prayer and silence)?

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3. See appendix for enneagram hand-out. This enneagram handouts was a very small part of the conversation. A few of the participants were well-versed in enneagrams, so that strongly facilitated the conversation.

4. See appendix

2. How many minutes a week do you spend reading and reflecting on the Bible? This is separate from any work you may do for a work-related activity)?
3. How many minutes a week do you spend in a Bible study, small group, or worship?
4. Looking back on the last five years, is the amount of time that you currently spend in personal devotion and Bible reflection more or less than at other times? By how many minutes on average?

Please take a moment to answer 1-5, with one being, "I strongly agree" and five being, "I strongly disagree". For the purpose of our time together, the phrase "the shalom of God" is to refer to the full integration of the experience of God's wholeness in every area of our life. If one is experiencing the shalom of God, one will feel consoled (close) and in step with God, and if one is not experiencing the shalom of God, one will feel desolate (far) and out of step with God.

1. I experience the shalom of God best when I am alone doing personal devotions.
2. I experience the shalom of God best when I am alone reading and reflecting on the Bible.
3. I experience the shalom of God best when I am with others.

In addition to the written post-test, verbal responses to these questions were given through oral interviews:

1. How did your experience of the shalom of God change through these last nine months? How has your life changed, in identity, behavior, attitude, and relationship? Please give examples as relevant.
2. How did your practice of spiritual disciplines change through these last nine months? How did you experience these changes in identity, behavior, attitude or relationships? Please give examples as relevant.
3. What was your biggest takeaway from our discussion about enneagrams? What did you learn that you might put into practice? Did anything surprise you? Please give examples as relevant.
4. In these nine months, what did you think was the most important aspect of our time together? What haven't I asked that I need to know? What else should I learn from your experience?

The Impulse Behind The Project

I have been an ordained pastor almost twenty years now. The pastorate is the most humbling, rewarding, heartbreaking and often lonely call on the planet. It is the life I am called to, but there have been times where I seriously questioned that call.

In my first ordained call, I served as an associate pastor in a wonderful congregation. They were kind and loving people, who were happy to have me there. However, I served under a head of staff who was a tough fit for me. There were a variety of challenges between the two of us, mostly centering around our different personalities and ministry styles. It was a challenge to work together, from the beginning, and it never got better. I was a first-time pastor and I did not know which way to turn. I felt so alone.

In the midst of the personnel challenges, there was a school shooting at the local high school, where one of our youth ministry students was killed. In a small community, this was unexpected. The repercussions were great. I had limited ministry experience but stepped into a pastoral counseling role for the family of the killed child, the church family and the community at large. I was completely out of my depth. I felt inadequate and was questioning how God could call me there. I felt profoundly alone.

At the time, I had a colleague in ministry who met me when I began my service at the church. She interviewed me as part of my admission to the presbytery, where I was called. We had an easy collegiality but didn't know each other well. Over lunch, we were discussing ministry challenges and our spiritual lives. I confessed I was considering, quite seriously, leaving ministry altogether. The working dynamic with my head of staff was too challenging. I was completely out of my depth in the midst of the great deal of counseling I was offering. I felt profoundly alone.

She listened and sympathized with me. We prayed and sought the leading of the Holy Spirit. We discerned the issue was not my call to ministry, but the placement of the current call at that particular church, with that particular head of staff. As a result of the leading of the Holy Spirit through that conversation, I found a better fit in ministry and I am still actively serving the Lord in ordained ministry almost twenty years later. It has been a wonderful life in ministry, one that I would have likely missed if I had not had that lunch with an acquaintance many years ago.

I know my story is not unique. Ministry is difficult and I am certain clergy think of leaving their call on a regular basis. Pastors are called to ministries and pastors leave ministries, but I am concerned that pastors leave before they are called by God to leave

because it can be profoundly lonely to serve the Lord. I am concerned that pastors have a more difficult call to ministry because they do not have the intentional community that prays for them, supports them, speaks truth into their lives and discerns God's movement in the midst of it. I began this project, and will continue to have these sorts of conversations because the world needs Christ-centered pastors who are able to do what God has called them to do. I want every pastor to thrive and reach the world for Christ. I want every pastor to have a safe place to be fully formed and transformed into the person of Christ that God intended. I want every pastor to know they are not alone.

The Covenant Community of Pastors

I chose a group of women pastors to participate because I wanted to afford the most amount of transparency in the conversations. I knew that for a few of the women in the group, having only women in the conversation would be a great benefit. I have participated in mixed-gender covenant groups and have found that mix to bring a different dynamic that has been helpful. It certainly can be successful to have different genders. For the clergy I asked, I felt it would be more helpful to invite only women.

I chose a group of pastors from three denominations, including Presbyterian Church (USA), Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO) and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC). All three denominations have some cross-over in membership at different times. I have served in all three of the denominations in my career. I wanted there to be cross-pollination between the denominations as I hope that the pastors will take back to their local contexts what they have experienced and learned.

I chose a group of pastors who all hold reformed understandings of theology, but they also hold different opinions on some theological discussions. As covenant theology is a major influence in my theology, and in the forming of this project, I wanted covenant theology to be one shared value among the group.

I chose a group of pastors who served in different areas of the US for a couple of reasons. One, there is an insufficient number of female clergy in my local area to have been able to have enough for the covenant group. This would be the case for many women in ministry. As we were relying on technology for our connections, I thought it would be helpful to model that in our group. The technology made it easier, but I believe there is a missed opportunity for connection and community if all of the interactions are through the screen. For this purpose, we had a three day in-person retreat, to add the dimension of physical community and fellowship.

Findings

I hoped to find that when pastors participated in the covenant group and practiced spiritual disciplines, they would have an increased experience of the shalom of God. I hoped that these pastors would experience transformation and freedom in their lives because they were being obedient. I hoped to see more spiritual satisfaction and a greater peace that they were doing exactly what God called to do. I hoped to see friendships rooted in Christ being built over the thirty weeks together. I hoped to see pastors thrive in every area of their life and ministry.

The project was an overall extremely positive experience for all who participated. My hypothesis was the practice of spiritual disciplines and meeting regularly in a

covenant group will help pastors experience the shalom of God. I was a bit surprised that the data did not validate that hypothesis. While the practice of spiritual disciplines and the participation in covenant community did not uniformly nor consistently increase the experience of the shalom of God, both of these elements were received positively by the clergy.

The pastors were asked to read the assigned Bible passage or the spiritual formation book, depending in the week. They were asked to practice Examen five days a week. I gathered the participation data, which was fairly easy to quantify. I also measured the experience of shalom. As it was self-declared, this measure was too broad and too subjective to be able to measure. The experience was difficult to quantify.

About half of the pastors struggled to be consistent in their daily reading of God's Word, but their inconsistency did not have a commensurate effect on the experience of shalom of God. Every pastor commented that she was glad to have been able to spend time in the Word but had a variety of reasons for their inconsistency. Each pastor commented on the challenge most pastors face in reading God's Word, outside of sermon prep, lesson planning or a professional ministry motivation. Every pastor stated she felt encouraged to read Romans together. It was a community building experience and reminded them of the power of God, in and through them. Because we read a familiar book of the Bible together, many chose unfamiliar translations or listened to new audio versions. One pastor took on the spiritual practice to find music, prayers and images on line that highlighted the weekly text. Because the pastors read the familiar text together, they brought new expressions of approaching the text to our group. That was encouraging to all.

About half of the pastors struggled to be consistent in their practice of the spiritual disciplines, but their inconsistency did not have a commensurate effect on the experience of shalom. Every pastor, except for one, stated that she found the practice of Examen to be positive. It helped them pay more attention to themselves and to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Most of them commented that the practice had changed their prayer lives and the ways they approached everyday ministry challenges. As they were paying more attention throughout the day, they were able to see patterns, so they might prepare themselves in a different way than before. And every person appreciated the spiritual formation book we read. There was a bit of embarrassment and shame for the ones who were inconsistent but all desired to draw closer to God.

About half of the pastors struggled to be consistent in their practice of the reading the book on spiritual formation, but their inconsistency did not have a commensurate effect on the experience of shalom. Every one enjoyed the book and found it to be extremely helpful. The pastors talked weekly about what they had learned and where they had been challenged. The discussion about silence and sabbath were especially important in our group. Several made immediate changes by regulating the amount of distracting noise in their environment. They turned off the tv at home and turned off the radio when driving. A couple pastor took silent retreats as a result of the reflection.

I expected that there would be a correlation between practice of spiritual disciplines and participation in the covenant group with and increased experience of the shalom of God. It was not universally experienced. I have some ideas of possibilities for the inconsistency. Perhaps the two elements that I chose were not the most helpful in spiritual formation. There may have been other options that I did not consider or know. I

believe there are too many variables in the lives of the participants to have been able to have a direct correlation. The open nature of self-declaration of the experience of shalom was perhaps faulty. I imagine if I had given the test on a different day or more often, my data have been different.

There may have been too many participants to have deep conversations in our regular check-in. The choice was made to limit the time so that ministers with competing responsibilities could participate without it being too overwhelming. The limited time perhaps impacted some of the transformation experienced in the covenant community. The most significant variable is the participant. If one week the pastor did not have the time to practice the discipline, there may have been another element that God used in her formation. It could have been a conversation or person outside of our limited scope of community. The experience of the shalom of God is not confined to the project but my gathering of data was.

Certainly, there were inconsistencies in experience and expression. However, every pastor at one time or another said that the participation in the Seeking Shalom project was the most important thing they had done for themselves the whole week. There was an almost immediate sense of community and support, where each felt safe to share struggles and successes. For many, the sense of not being alone was the most important benefit in the project. All of the pastors maintain fellowship with one another and continue to cultivate the community that was created. This sense of community has continued on, after the completion of the project, where seven pastors continue to come together to seek the shalom of God.

CHAPTER 5 – OUTCOMES

Research Question

Q: Does the practice of spiritual disciplines and participation in a covenant group help pastors experience the shalom of God?

Expected End Results

I expected a direct correlation between the practice of spiritual disciplines in conjunction with participation in covenant group to increase the experience of the shalom of God. I expected that if a pastor participated in both spiritual disciplines and the covenant group, the pastor would have an increased experience of the shalom of God. In the same manner, I expected that if a pastor did not participate in spiritual disciplines and covenant group, the pastor would have a decreased experience of the shalom of God. I expected that if pastors were drawing closer to each other and closer to the Lord, their ability to fully know the shalom of God would increase. I expected their perception and experiences would be informed by the covenant community who was also looking for the shalom of God. I expected that as they were drawing closer to the Lord, their perspectives of their life and ministry would be informed by the bigger and more redemptive work of reconciliation that God has done and is doing.

Key Findings (Data)

There were seven Presbyterian pastors (numbered 1 to 7) who participated in this project. The seven pastors serve three different denominations; two from PC(USA), three from EPC and three from ECO. The pastors ranged in ages from thirty-nine to seventy years old. The pastors held different positions in their ministries and had different professional experiences. Each pastor was asked to set aside fifteen minutes a day, five days a week, for thirty weeks. Fifteen minutes, five days a week, seemed to be a reasonable amount of time for reflection and the demands of ministry. Thirty weeks fit well into a regular church year (October to May) and allowed enough time to potentially see some transformation. Each pastor was asked to participate in a weekly 90-minute zoom video conference call and to continue communication on the Marco Polo app, as their time and situation permitted. This allowed enough time for half of the covenant group to do a quick check-in and for the other half to do a more extended sharing. At both the beginning and end of the project, each pastor completed a survey where they self-designated their responses. For this project, the rating system parameters were set as follows: *For the purpose of our time together, the phrase "the shalom of God" is to refer to the full integration of the experience of God's wholeness in every area of our life. If you are experiencing the shalom of God, you will feel consoled (close) and in step with God and if you are not experiencing the shalom of God, you will feel desolate (far) and out of step with God. For our scoring: One is I strongly disagree, two is sometimes disagree, three is neither agree nor disagree, four is sometimes agree and five is strongly agree).*

Participant 1 submitted her data and participated in the spiritual disciplines and covenant group communication. The pastor significantly increased in her personal

devotionals, moving from 30 to 250 minutes a week. The pastor indicated the amount of time she spent in personal devotionals had decreased from 10-30 (minutes?) less than her practice five years earlier. This is not consistent with the written data she provided but it may be felt data (data that is perceived by the participant but not supported by quantifiable data). She was consistent in her reading (scoring an average of 4.56 times per week) but very inconsistent in her practice of Examen (scoring an average of .56 times per week). Her experience of the shalom of God increased from 4 to 5 in personal devotionals and increased in community from 2 to 4.

Participant 2 submitted her data and participated in the spiritual disciplines and covenant group communication. The pastor significantly increased in her personal devotionals, moving from 60 to 120 minutes a week. The pastor indicated the amount of time spent in personal devotionals had decreased by thirty minutes from her practice from five years earlier. This is not consistent with the written data she provided but it also may be her perception. She was not consistent in her reading (scoring an average of 2.4 times per week) but better in her practice of Examen (scoring an average of 3.5 times per week). Her experience of the shalom of God increased from 3 to 5 in personal devotionals and increased from 3 to 4 in community.

Participant 3 submitted her data and participated in the spiritual disciplines and covenant group communication. The pastor experienced significant personal and professional challenges throughout the time of our group. She decreased from 30 to 60 minutes a week in her personal devotionals and decreased from 300 to 60 minutes in Bible study and worship. The pastor indicated the amount of time she spent had significantly decreased by 100 minutes in personal devotionals from her practice five

years earlier. She was extremely inconsistent in her reading (scoring an average of .3 times per week) and in her practice of Examen (scoring an average of .3 times per week). Her experience of the shalom of God decreased from 4 to 2 in personal devotionals and decreased from 5 to 4 in community.

Participant 4 submitted her data and participated in the spiritual disciplines and covenant group communication. The pastor decreased in her personal devotionals, moving from 150 to between 60 and 90 minutes a week. The pastor decreased in her reflecting on the Bible from 90 to between 30 and 45 minutes a week. The pastor decreased in her Bible study and worship from 180 to between 60 and 120 minutes a week. The pastor indicated the amount of time she spent in personal devotionals had remained the same as her practice five years earlier. She was fairly consistent in her reading (scoring an average of 3.77 times per week) and in her practice of Examen (scoring an average of 3.8 times per week). Her experience of the shalom of God in personal devotionals decreased from 4 to 3.

Participant 5 submitted her data and participated in the spiritual disciplines and covenant group communication. The pastor significantly increased from 30 to 140 minutes a week in her personal devotionals. The pastor had a slight increase moving from 120 to 140 minutes a week reflecting on Scripture and increased from 150 to 165 minutes a week and in Bible study and worship. The pastor indicated the amount of time she spent in personal devotionals had increased by 140 minutes from her practice five years earlier. She was extremely consistent, even surpassing expectations of the group, in her reading (scoring an average of 5.43 times per week) and very consistent in her practice of

Examen (scoring an average of 6.27 times per week). Her experience of the shalom of God increased from 3 to 4 in personal devotionals and remained the same in community.

Participant 6 submitted her data and participated in the spiritual disciplines and covenant group communication. The pastor slightly increased from 200 to 210 minutes a week in her personal devotionals. The pastor slightly decreased from 105 to 90 minutes a week in her reflecting on the Bible. The pastor greatly increased from 180 to 240 minutes a week in her participation in Bible study and worship. The pastor indicated the amount of time she spent in personal devotionals had increased by ninety minutes from her practice five years earlier. She was extremely consistent (even surpassing expectations) in her reading (scoring an average of 5.83 times per week) and very consistent in her practice of Examen (scoring an average of 4.67 times per week). Her experience of the shalom of God remained the same in each area.

Participant 7 submitted her data and participated in the spiritual disciplines and covenant group communication. The pastor significantly increased from 150 to 300 minutes a week in her personal devotionals. The pastor significantly increased from 75 to 300 minutes a week in her Bible reflection. The pastor decreased from 375 to 240 minutes a week in her Bible study and worship. Her overall time in reflection significantly increased 340 minutes a week. The pastor indicated the amount of time she spent in personal devotionals had remained the same from her practice five years earlier. She was somewhat consistent in her reading (scoring an average of 3.8 times per week) and very consistent in her practice of Examen (scoring an average of 5 times per week). Her experience of the shalom of God in community devotionals decreased from 4 to 3.

Interpretation of Findings

My hypothesis was two-fold: if a pastor participates in both spiritual disciplines and the covenant group, the pastor will have an increased experience of the shalom of God. In the same manner, if a pastor does not participate in both spiritual disciplines and the covenant group, the pastor will have a decreased experience of the shalom of God.

The research results were inconsistent and my hypothesis was partially validated. Three of the seven pastors had both a high level of practice of spiritual disciplines and participation in the covenant group and also had a greatly increased experience of the shalom of God. One of the seven pastors had both a low level of practice of spiritual disciplines and participation in the covenant group and also had a decreased experience of the shalom of God. As my hypothesis was only partially validated, the hypothesis was partially invalidated. One of the seven pastors had a high level of practice of spiritual disciplines and participation in the covenant group but had a decreased experience of the shalom of God. One of the seven pastors had a low level of practice of spiritual disciplines and participation in the covenant group but had an increased experience of the shalom of God. One of the seven pastors had a high level of practice of spiritual disciplines and participation in the covenant group but had no change in their experience of the shalom of God.

The experience of shalom was different for each participant in the group. Many factors may have influenced the pastors' experience. In the diversity of the body (as represented in our covenant group), there were different experiences, personalities, and

personal and professional situations that made a difference. Each participant had different experiences that brought them to the point where they entered the covenantal community with the others. Each participant had different personalities and ways they prefer to communicate. This was especially evident in the contrasts between the introverted and extroverted participants. The diversity of the body is reflected in the covenant group, but some of those differences may have made it more complicated to experience the shalom of God. God's people are called to live in community with each other and with the Lord, so God's people must be intentional to set aside time in their schedules and establish a covenantal community to seek the shalom of God.

Outcomes

While not every participant had an increase in the experience of the shalom of God, every participant commented at one time or another the covenant group was the most helpful and meaningful thing they did. The sense of community was important to all. One participant said, "Knowing that others were reading and processing similar texts and readings automatically put me in the mind frame of being in ministry with others" (Participant 2). This changed perspective in community was vital as it helped the participants look for God's work in their lives and in the lives of the other participants.

I expected there would be a direct change in the experience of shalom as participants practiced spiritual disciplines. However, those who practiced the disciplines of Examen, reading Scripture and a devotional book did find the disciplines to be mostly positive. Some preferred other spiritual disciplines, such as solitude, silence and fasting, which they had been practicing before our group was formed. I chose Examen because of

its simplicity. It takes a moment to reflect but cultivates an awareness of what God is doing around, in and through us. One who struggled with the disciplines said, "I was not as faithful in the Examen as I should have been, but the idea of being watchful and where did I see God and what He was doing in my life. I really enjoyed that" (Participant 1). The practice of spiritual disciplines was important for individuals but was helpful in building community in the group. "I really missed it when we weren't reading together. I liked that discipline. I really liked the Ruth Haley Barton book and my soul just soaked that up. But I missed reading Scripture with you guys" (Participant 6). While not uniformly effective in changing the experience of the shalom of God, their practice of spiritual disciplines was a catalyst for building community. It was important they were reading and reflecting, but especially with one another.

I learned the practice of spiritual disciplines and participation in covenant group helped transform a group of relative strangers to an intimate community of faith and support. One remarked, "I have a deeper sense of community in Christ…There is something transforming about being in weekly relationship with people who pray for me and I with them" (Participant 2). Another agreed, saying, "That safety. That invitation to vulnerability…knowing that we were going to hold each other in prayer and keep things in confidence. And be able to get into the nitty gritty. And to feel like we were in it together. We're pulling for each other and not a single one of us is on our own" (Participant 6). The change from living life on one's own to being part of a covenantal community of faith was significant. God's people seek the shalom of God in their individual lives, but being part of a covenantal community helps people seek the shalom of God in a distinctly different way. Part of covenantal living is found in sharing burdens

and blessings together. When God's people share life together, they become extensions of God's grace.

God's grace changed a group of strangers to a community, despite the fact the participants were in different geographical areas. One participant said, "The weekly gatherings and the polo interactions help us live daily life with each other. This made a huge difference in the effectiveness of our group. I felt that we became invested, mindful and thoughtful of one another as if we lived just a few miles apart" (Participant 2). The group of participants met weekly for thirty weeks and maintained communication through the marco polo app, texting, emailing and meeting in person when possible. These practices built the relationships that enabled the community to flourish.

Towards the end of the thirty weeks, six of the participants and the facilitator met at the facilitator's home for a three-day retreat. (One participant had to cancel her participation at the retreat due to an unforeseeable personal issue.) Across the board, the retreat was received well. The time away together changed relationships that were already formed. Fellowship had been established by the video conference zoom calls and the marco polo video messages, but a different intimacy develops happens when people sit across the table from one another. There is a different kind of chemistry and intimacy in sharing the same meal, having the same spontaneous laughter, and looking directly into people's eyes. It changes the dynamics of the relationships and propelled the intimacy felt within the group. One participant said, "It was so important to meet in the flesh" (Participant 3). Technology (including Marco Polo, texts, and e-mails) made it possible to build community quickly but the retreat was an important aspect in the deepening the covenantal community. Meeting in person allows different kind of

intimacy to develop, which only happens over time being shared around a table, walking along a path, and living life together.

During the retreat, the covenant group had an extended conversation about the enneagram. The enneagram categorizes leaders with a different characteristics and helps others understand why and how they operate the way they do. The enneagram shows the strengths and growth curves and helps people work together well. Each participant completed the pretest prior to the gathering and had some indication of where she fell in the enneagram. A few of the participants had previously examined the enneagram but most had not. The group discussed each strategy of the type and how they saw these traits present in each one's life and ministry. They also discussed each strategy and how they saw these traits present in the lives of others in the group. The discussion helped the participants evaluate their gifts and growth curves for leadership and ministry. While helpful for most, the conversation was difficult for one participant who said, "I felt a deep sense of inadequacy. I felt that several personality types were better equipped for leadership than my own" (Participant 2). This conversation about being equipped for ministry is an important conversation for pastors to have with each other and with the congregations they serve. The secular world may try to speak into the discussion, urging churches to call only stereotypical CEO leaders. Pastors may feel limited or dissuaded from ministry opportunities because they do hold those expected characteristics of CEO.

Covenantal community motivates participants to have a changed affect about themselves and their ministry and motivates to them to implement change in their lives and ministry. One participant commented the discussion reminded her of the biblical truth of her value and worth. "I am continually battling the voices in my head…not good

enough…not cute enough…not skinny enough…not enough. Whatever. Those things (the enneagram), although secular tools, help remind me that I am fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God and that I am one of Christ's beloved" (Participant 4). God used that time to remind each pastor she was made in the image of Him, and that her diverse gifts were the creative endeavor of a God who loves her. This reminder was experienced in covenantal community where each member is different. Covenantal community brings together particular strengths and gifts of each member so they best flourish as they bolster and edify other members of the community of faith.

This speaking into each other's lives happened in the discussion around Enneagrams and throughout the entire thirty weeks of ongoing check-ins. One participant shared, "My attitude has been much better. I have been able to, because of having you guys praying for me and to process with, I have been able to not bring as much of that stress and tension home with me. That has been good for my marriage, I think" (Participant 6). Another said as a result of reading Ruth Haley Barton's book and the discussions following, "I have been attentive to the practice of solitude and silence…I have started turning off the radio in my car. Silence and solitude has been a big one and one certainly that I need to continue to practice" (Participant 4). Seeking the shalom of God in community enables a changed affect and action. The transformation occurred in many of the participants because community helped remind them to pay attention to the leading of the Holy Spirit and to each other.

When one experiences God in a new way that transforms them, it makes a difference in how they live in the world and serve the Lord in their ministries. Each participant in the covenant group was changed because of their participation. One

participant asserted, “I would say that it (the experience of the shalom of God) increased exponentially.” (Participant 6). She was not alone in her experience. Another participant articulated what others had said throughout, saying, “My experience of the shalom of God has changed over these last nine months. It’s really more of an awareness of when I feel His peace and when I have moved away from His peace.” (Participant 5). A challenge in ministry is the relentlessness of responsibility and tasks to be accomplished. It can be difficult to create the time to try to be aware of what God is doing in the midst of ministry and life. This project enabled participants to carve out time in their schedules to do be able to notice what God was doing. As they experienced a bit of this presence and work of the Lord, it changed them. They could see a difference in their life from when they were aligned with God and experienced the peace of God and when they had moved away from God.

This increased experience of shalom occurred, at least, in part, because of the safety participants felt to be authentic and vulnerable. “I experienced the shalom of God, absolutely, through a community of support. The great thing about the shalom sisters, for me, was that I had a safe place (Participant 3). As each participant became more familiar with each other and shared different aspects of life and ministry, trust was established. As trust was established, and confidences were maintained, the relationships became safe places to share. As the relationships grew and deepened over the many weeks together, the group became a transformational community.

This transformation happened in community because there was support for each other. It is more than just seeing God at work in one’s life, but watching for, praying for and celebrating the work of the Lord in others. One said, “My life is definitely changed in

the past year because of knowing these women and hearing the Lord's voice of encouragement, comfort, and challenge" (Participant 2). This project was a transformative experience, where each participated in covenantal community. One participant shared, "We've seen God at work in our lives… (it made a difference) knowing that I had you guys to lean on as I discerned and then just knowing that I have got you guys in the corner praying for me as I discern with God the next steps- to step out with you." (Participant 4). Another said, "In a daily way and in ministry challenges I think my approach to things is different than if I had just been on my own…it gave me insights that can only come with other people speaking into our lives (Participant 2)." She was able to articulate the way that something distinctly different happens when God's people live life together. God's people are created to live in relationship, with both Him and one another, and God works in and through that community.

This community between God and God's people is a gift, as ministry is uniquely challenging. One participant said, "Being a pastor can be a lonely place…it has been a time of encouragement and having caring friends. Having a safe place to be real… it's hard to explain how wonderful that has been" (Participant 5). As God's people live intentionally in covenant community, it becomes another way to experience Immanuel, God with us. One participant stated, "(It helped) to know I wasn't alone in my ministry, in my work, in my life. It's the whole God with us (Participant 3)." This covenant community modelled incarnational ministry that each pastor preaches about and strives for in their lives. Experiencing the reality of God coming to be with God's people in and through the participants helped address the loneliness many feel in ministry.

The experience was profound for the participants. One stated, “This Shalom experience has been for me, the most profound experience I have had with ministry colleagues as I have a greater sense of spiritual health, my awareness of God at work in my personal life and ministry life has increased and my emotional health around ministry has benefited from having this community” (Participant 2). Every participant echoed this sentiment, at one time or another. It was important to live out the covenant together.

Possible Adaptations for Other Groups

Another summarized beautifully, “I just think it’s a wonderful example of how you can intentionally create community in Christ. That we came- some of us knew each other very well, and others didn’t know anyone at all. But with a very clear structure, guidelines, and having very clear expectations, you can foster a sense of community even from far away. So that a wonderful thing to know. This was a gift. We have all said it. But for every single one of us, this group came at an important, pivotal time for us. And I think God used it to shepherd us through different struggles and transitions and to help us take the next steps in our relationship with Him” (Participant 6).

After this project, I am convinced of the necessity to do two things: 1) to create covenant groups for pastors where they can practice spiritual disciplines, and 2) to actively participate in covenant groups and spiritual practices for the rest of my life and ministry. God uses these relationships in covenant community to make a difference in the lives of others. God uses these practices and relationship to form God’s people to experience the shalom of God.

The group size was challenging, especially for the introverts. It made it difficult to share deeply without being too onerous for weekly responsibilities. One participant said, "The group is too big. As an introvert, I felt like I did not have the space to process and to talk" (Participant 1). Another initially agreed saying, "Less people would have been better. Because of the amount of people there wasn't enough time to process reading and such" (Participant 7). She later contradicted herself about the group size saying, "But having that many people made it more comfortable if there were one or two missing. So the size of the group helped that" (Participant 7). Another participant added, "I think the makeup of the group was perfect. Different stages and ages and similar vocations. Different perspectives. I've loved having all of that (Participant 4)."

When forming future groups, I suggest the weekly meeting group should be kept smaller (between 4-6 people) so it is more manageable and approachable for the introverts. The facilitator plays an important ongoing role for the success of the covenant group. The facilitator prepares before the meetings start and leads throughout the time the participants meet. The facilitator should prayerfully consider the personality make-up of the group members to be help ensure the satisfaction of all members. If the extroverts are too outspoken, it may create a more challenging atmosphere for the more reserved introverts. To that end, the facilitator must be aware of this potential challenge and vigilant to protect the experience of the more introverted participants. The facilitator should also have a one-on-one conversation after the group has found its rhythm to get feedback on the participants' experience. If there are initial issues, the facilitator can address them before they become a larger issue.

The groups should continue to meet via Zoom (or something that enables video conferencing) and also have an in-person three-day retreat. If the proximity allows, the weekly meetings would be better in person, but available technology allows for much flexibility. One participant would have preferred the discussion around enneagram earlier in the Zoom call, but I still suggest the conversation about enneagrams occur as part of the retreat. The participant stated, "I wish we had done the enneagram earlier in our time together because I think that would have been helpful for me in how we talked and worked together" (Participant 1). If the facilitator addressed issues in the initial mid-project conversation, working together would be easier for those who are struggling.

What Else Needs to Be Done

This is important work for the transformation of God's people. The practice of spiritual disciplines and participation in covenant groups should be part of the strategy for self-care. Pastors often do not fully realize how much they need both efforts.

There should be a concerted effort to have pastors commit to seeking the shalom of God. Sessions and judicatories should urge their leaders to create the margin to do just this. Covenant groups should be established to allow pastors enough flexibility (and time) to practice spiritual disciplines and participate in covenant while still honoring their vocational responsibilities. Pastors should meet weekly and commit to an extended amount of time (for our purposes, 90 minutes). If pastors do this, over time, they will be transformed by the Lord and their ministries will also reflect this transformation.

APPENDIX A – PRE-TEST FOR SEEKING SHALOM

Julia Leeth

Leadership in a Changing Church Context, Dr. Singleton

1. How many minutes a week on average do you spend in personal devotions (including but not limited to journaling, reading, prayer and silence)? _____
2. How many minutes a week do you spend reading and reflecting on the Bible? This is separate from any Bible work you may do for a work-related activity)? _____
3. How many minutes a week do you spend in a Bible study, small group, or worship? _____
4. Looking back on the last five years, is the amount of time that you currently spend in personal devotion and Bible reflection more or less than at other times? By how many minutes on average? _____ (please be sure to list plus or minutes before number)
5. Please take a moment to designate from 1 to 5. For the purpose of our time together, the phrase "the shalom of God" is to refer to the full integration of the experience of God's wholeness in every area of our life. If you are experiencing the shalom of God, you will feel consoled (close) and in step with God and if you are not experiencing the shalom of God, you will feel desolate (far) and out of step with God. For our scoring: One is I strongly disagree, two is sometimes disagree, three is neither agree nor disagree, four is sometimes agree and five is strongly agree).

a. I experience the shalom of God best when I am alone doing personal devotions. (One is I strongly disagree, two is sometimes disagree, three is neither agree nor disagree, four is sometimes agree and five is strongly agree). _____
b. I experience the shalom of God best when I am alone reading and reflecting on the Bible. (One is I strongly disagree, two is sometimes disagree, three is neither agree nor disagree, four is sometimes agree and five is strongly agree). _____
c. I experience the shalom of God best when I am with others. (One is I strongly disagree, two is sometimes disagree, three is neither agree nor disagree, four is sometimes agree and five is strongly agree. _____

Please take a moment to affirm that you give permission to Julia Leeth to collect data from our conversations, surveys and any other documentation generated around this covenant group. This will be for the purpose of completing the Doctorate of Ministry in Leadership in a Changing Church Context at Gordon Conwell. I also understand there may be paperwork, including documents from IRB paperwork that Julia Leeth will forward. I also understand that Julia Leeth will take steps to maintain my confidentiality and will not name me in her work.

_____ (initial) date _____

APPENDIX B – POST-TEST FOR SEEKING SHALOM

Julia Leeth

Leadership in a Changing Church Context, Dr. Singleton

1. How many minutes a week on average do you spend in personal devotions (including but not limited to journaling, reading, prayer and silence)? _____
2. How many minutes a week do you spend reading and reflecting on the Bible? This is separate from any Bible work you may do for a work-related activity)? _____
3. How many minutes a week do you spend in a Bible study, small group, or worship? _____
4. Looking back on the last five years, is the amount of time that you currently spend in personal devotion and Bible reflection more or less than at other times? By how many minutes on average? _____ (please be sure to list plus or minutes before number)
5. Please take a moment to designate from 1 to 5. For the purpose of our time together, the phrase "the shalom of God" is to refer to the full integration of the experience of God's wholeness in every area of our life. If you are experiencing the shalom of God, you will feel consoled (close) and in step with God and if you are not experiencing the shalom of God, you will feel desolate (far) and out of step with God. For our scoring: One is I strongly disagree, two is sometimes disagree, three is neither agree nor disagree, four is sometimes agree and five is strongly agree).

a. I experience the shalom of God best when I am alone doing personal devotions. (One is I strongly disagree, two is sometimes disagree, three is neither agree nor disagree, four is sometimes agree and five is strongly agree). _____
b. I experience the shalom of God best when I am alone reading and reflecting on the Bible. (One is I strongly disagree, two is sometimes disagree, three is neither agree nor disagree, four is sometimes agree and five is strongly agree). _____
c. I experience the shalom of God best when I am with others. (One is I strongly disagree, two is sometimes disagree, three is neither agree nor disagree, four is sometimes agree and five is strongly agree. _____
d. Is there any other comments you'd like to add?

Please take a moment to affirm that you give permission to Julia Leeth to collect data from our conversations, surveys and any other documentation generated around this covenant group. This will be for the purpose of completing the Doctorate of Ministry in Leadership in a Changing Church Context at Gordon Conwell. I also understand there may be paperwork, including documents from IRB paperwork that Julia Leeth will forward. I also understand that Julia Leeth will take steps to maintain my confidentiality and will not name me in her work.

_____ (initial) date _____

APPENDIX C – RETREAT SCHEDULE

Friday:

Afternoon: Arrivals and free time

Evening: Fellowship and dinner

Saturday:

Morning: Check-ins and prayer

Afternoon: Fellowship activity (wine tasting in Napa)

Evening: Dinner together and more check-ins

Sunday:

Morning: Worship together

Afternoon: Enneagram discussion

Evening: Dinner and check-ins

Monday:

Morning: Breakfast and departures

APPENDIX D – ENNEAGRAM HAND-OUT

This hand-out intends to be a discussion-starter and not a detailed summary.

Nine Paths to God (Chris Heuertz, The Sacred Enneagram):

One: Strive for principled excellence as moral duty

Two: Strive for lavish love through self-sacrifice

Three: Strive for appreciated recognition through curated successes

Four: Strive for discovery of identity for their own faithful authenticity

Five: Strive for decisive clarity through thoughtful conclusions

Six: Strive for steady constancy through confident loyalty

Seven: Strive for imaginative freedom for inspirational independence

Eight: Strive for passionate intensity for our own unfettered autonomy

Nine: Strive for harmonious peacefulness for congruent repose

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